

COUNTRY

CARRIE UNDERWOOD

ONLY

THE INSIDE STORIES ON COUNTRY MUSIC'S HOTTEST
APRIL 6, 2015

**THIS
WEEK'S NASH
FEATURING
CARRIE
UNDERWOOD**

Wade Hayes reflects on his future and being cancer-free

The sky's the limit as Kris Kristofferson, Jason Isbell & Lady A join forces

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CW EXCLUSIVE

GARY ALLAN

on being an underdog and surviving the music business

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THE HIT LIST

Full Nelson

▼ Rain, snow, sleet and hail—nothing could keep country music devotees from getting to Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in early



March to enjoy rare back-to-back nights of music with the legendary **WILLIE NELSON**. The weather couldn't have been any more adverse, with every form of precipitation falling from the winter sky, but the historic building was packed out and toasty warm as fans literally slid in to enjoy Willie and opening act **RAINEY QUALLEY**.



Lucky Strike

◀ The duo **STRIKING MATCHES** has just released a powder keg of an album, *Nothing but the Silence*. Justin Davis and Sarah

Zimmerman, who comprise the pairing, write, play and sing music that's not easily categorized, but they're equally comfortable with country, rock and blues, which all come together to create an exciting, rootsy sound. And both are first-rate guitar slingers. You've likely picked up on their song "When the Right One Comes Along" on the TV series *Nashville*. Now it's time to pick up their album.



ZBB + SNL = A-OK

▲ For their first *Saturday Night Live* appearance, **ZAC BROWN BAND** showed their versatility by playing jangly single "Homegrown" and then returning for the aggressive, grungy rocker "Heavy Is the Head" with Soundgarden singer Chris Cornell. It's like a dare to other country artists: just you try and see what happens.



Blaze 'n' Paisley

◀ We love it when country stars bring their young fans onstage to sing or play an instrument, but we love it even more when they discover a true talent. **BRAD PAISLEY** sure did when he

brought guitarist **BLAZE BAUM** onstage at the Colorado Springs World Arena. The 21-year-old joined the country star on "Pride and Joy" and "Rocky Mountain Way" and confidently held his own.



Silver Screening

▲ **COLE SWINDELL** didn't need an exotic location for the video shoot for "Ain't Worth the Whiskey." He slipped into one of *Country Weekly's* Hot Spots—Silver Dollar Saloon—to get the perfect backdrop for his "I'm way over you" anthem. And props to Cole for using the breakup tune to draw attention to his real-life buddy who serves in the U.S. Special Forces.

THE JUKEBOX

Essential songs from the artists featured in this issue!

Gary Allan

"Hangover Tonight"
"Songs About Rain"

Carrie Underwood

"Little Toy Guns"
"Before He Cheats"

Jason Aldean

"Burnin' It Down"

Lady Antebellum

"Freestyle"

A Thousand Horses

"Smoke"

Michael Ray

"Kiss You in the Morning"

Casey James

"Fall Apart"

Rascal Flatts

"I Won't Let Go"

Wade Hayes

"What I Meant to Say"

Jeff Bates

"I Wanna Make You Cry"

Will Hoge

"Middle of America"

Sarah Dunn

"Bye Bye"

Randy Houser

"Like a Cowboy"

William Elliott Whitmore

"Civilizations"

Look for this
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playlist on **rdio**!



COVER STORY

44

Gary Allan

By his own admission, the husky-voiced singer has been a “survivor” for nearly 20 years in the music business. But he wouldn’t have played the game any other way. Check out his latest single, “Hangover Tonight,” from his upcoming new album.

24 | A Thousand Horses

The kicking Southern rockers are riding a smoking debut single that has ears popping.

50 | Summer Festivals

From New York to the Midwest and the California coast, these star-packed fests will heat up your summer calendar.

58 | Rascal Flatts

At the start of their recently completed Las Vegas residency, the guys already knew they were on to a good thing.

62 | Wade Hayes

He’s now cancer-free, and the singer/guitarist vows to make every moment count from this point forward.



27 NASH

NASH Music Madness has played its final note of the season and the winner, as determined by your votes, is that long-range shooter herself, Carrie Underwood. Find out how all of your favorites fared. Plus, take a peek behind the scenes of Sunny Sweeney's new video, "My Bed," co-starring the handsome Will Hoge.



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Jeff Bates.

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Dear Readers:

I would consider **GARY ALLAN** the strong silent type. He doesn't speak out much, you don't see him in the news and he's not flashy with his fame. But one thing Gary does have is longevity, something that he sees as a sign of success. Gary started in the business in 1996, and while he's been overlooked by awards shows, Gary has experienced steady success with

his music. The singer sat down with *CW* to talk about staying power, his style of music and remaining true to himself.

In this week's *NASH* section, **CARRIE UNDERWOOD** is victorious in our *NASH* Music Madness competition. Carrie battled through a bracket of 16 stars on the strength of your votes to become champ. We go on set with **SUNNY SWEENEY** as she films her video for "My Bed," featuring **WILL HOGE**; Blair Garner chats with the nicest guy in country, **DARIUS RUCKER**; and so much more!

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands April 6, as we get friendly with one of country's bad boys, **DWIGHT YOAKAM**.



See you next week!

LISA KONICKI, Editor in Chief

Tell Us What YOU Think!

MAIL: Letters, *Country Weekly*,
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Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. *Country Weekly* assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

MISSING OUT

The Legends of Country special issue was good BUT you missed many of the really greats, such as Tommy Hunter, Gordon Lightfoot, Eddy Arnold, Hank Snow, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Hank Thompson, Roy Rogers, just to name a few. I know there are more country legends that I have not mentioned. It would be great if you could compile another Legends of Country special and put it on the market.

— **CHRIS GREEN**

*Prince Rupert,
British Columbia*

A GREAT SHOWMAN

Thank you for the great article on Jeff Bates ["Sittin' Twitty," Jan. 26]. I have seen him perform several times. He always puts on a great show. I would love to see him more in *Country Weekly*.

— **DOROTHY PEPPL**

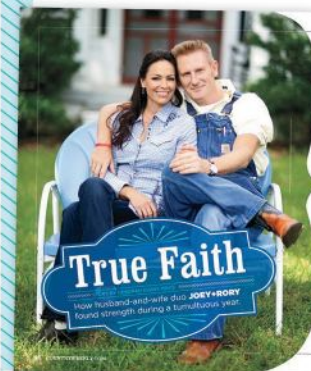
Harvard, Ill.

BLESSED

I loved the story on Joey+Rory ["True Faith," Jan. 26]. I too believe that [their daughter] Indiana Boon is a true gift from heaven. God does not pick just anyone to be parents—only the blessed ones.

— **K. LINDEE**

Glencoe, Minn.



As the songwriters with 8 songs featured on ABC's Hit Drama *Nashville*, Sarah Zimmermann and Justin Davis occupy that sweet spot at the intersection of country, rock and blues, where all elements blend together to form an authentic raw and rootsy sound with a timeless appeal.

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- Hunter Hayes

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KELLY'S BIG DAY

Kelly Clarkson (in red) appeared on *Good Morning America* to announce her upcoming tour and took time to pose with co-host Amy Robach and the Navy Reserves, as well as perform for the crowd.

the mix

ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE STARS OF COUNTRY—AND THEN SOME!

The Sky Is the Limit

LADY ANTEBELLUM, **KRIS KRISTOFFERSON** and **JASON ISBELL** will join forces on the second installment of Skyville Live on April 7. The innovative concert series, which will stream exclusively on *skyvillelive.com*, is designed to bring together artists from different genres.

For the latest music news,
go to **COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM**





BIG HITS

(From left) Big Kenny, host Troy Vollhoffer, Phil Vassar and Cheap Trick's Robin Zander attend a T.J. Martell benefit in February.



HIP, HIP, HOO-RAE

Raelynn performed on *Today* and visited with (from left) Al Roker, Natalie Morales and Willie Geist.

ALL-STAR LINEUP FOR 2015 CMA MUSIC FEST

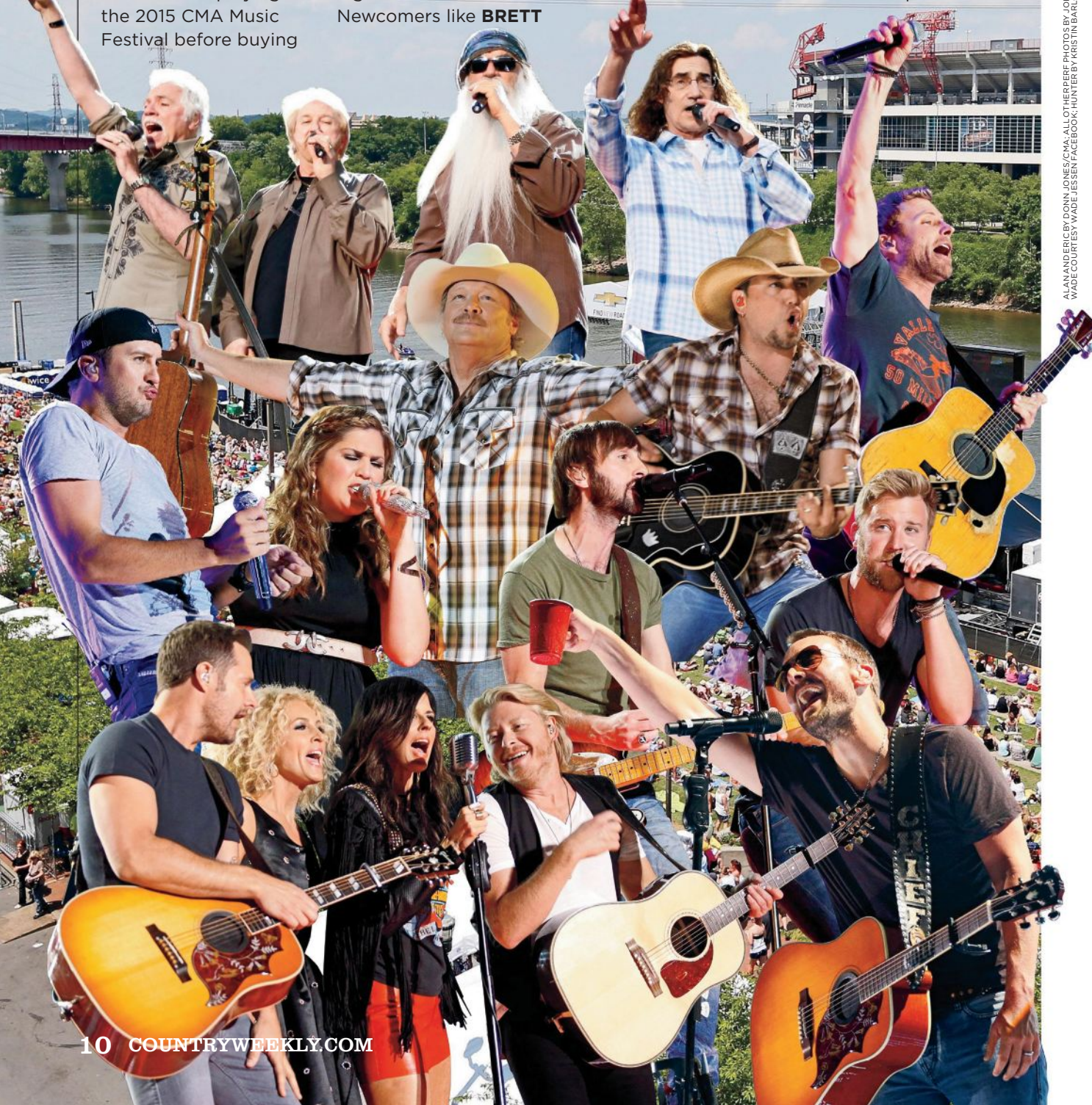
If you've been waiting to see who's playing the 2015 CMA Music Festival before buying

tickets, you're out of luck: it sold out in November. If you bought early, you'll be happy to know that **JASON AL-DEAN**, **DIERKS BENTLEY**, **LUKE BRYAN** and **ERIC CHURCH** are among the artists playing the nightly shows at Nashville's LP Field during the June 11-14 event. Newcomers like **BRETT**



ELDREDGE, **SAM HUNT**, **THOMAS RHETT** and **COLE SWINDELL** will also appear on the "big stage" along with

superstar groups like **LADY ANTEBELLUM**, **LITTLE BIG TOWN**, **THE BAND PERRY** and **ZAC BROWN BAND**. And if you have a hankering to see some of country music's icons, **ALAN JACKSON**, **WYNNONNA**, **NEAL MCCOY** and **THE OAK RIDGE BOYS** are also set to perform.



ALAN AND ERIC BY DONN JONES/CMA; ALL OT HER PERF PHOTOS BY JOHN RUSSELL/CMA; BOBBY COURTESY BOBBY EHMONS.COM; WADE COURTESY WADE JESSEN FACEBOOK; HUNTER BY KRISTIN BARLOWE/FEB MEDIA

MUSICAL NOTES

IN MEMORY

BOBBY EMMONS, songwriter and noted session musician, died Feb. 23 at age 72. Bobby wrote such hits as "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)" for Waylon Jennings and Tanya Tucker's "Love Me Like You Used To" and played on sessions for Elvis Presley, The Highwaymen and Garth Brooks, among others.



WADE JESSEN, senior chart manager for *Billboard* magazine, died March 5 in Nashville at age 53 after suffering a heart attack. Wade was considered an expert in analyzing country music charts and was often a source for *Country Weekly* and other industry publications.

BILLY BLOCK, music entrepreneur and songwriter, died March 11 at age 59 following a battle with cancer. He was the host of the weekly Billy Block

Show and an early proponent of the Americana movement who worked in numerous facets of the business and with artists from Jason Aldean to BR5-49 over the years.



LEGAL NEWS



BRAD WARREN, a member of The Warren Brothers as well as a top songwriter, has been named in a lawsuit by the mother of a Nashville high school student who took his own life. The student's mother alleges that Brad's son verbally abused and bullied her son before he committed suicide, and has named Brad, his wife and son and the school in the suit.

CERTIFICATIONS

HUNTER HAYES has received a double platinum certification for his single "I Want Crazy" for sales of 2 million copies. Hunter also received gold certifications for sales of 500,000 for each of the singles "Everybody's Got Somebody but Me" and "Invisible."



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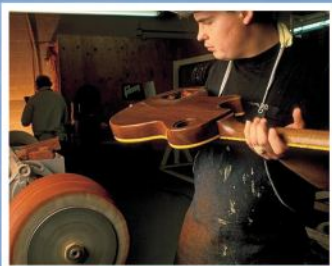
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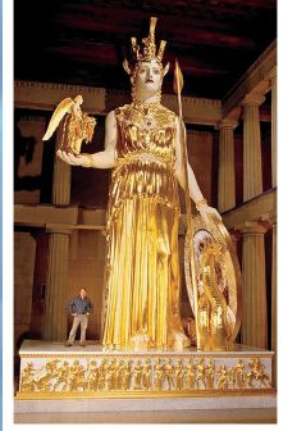
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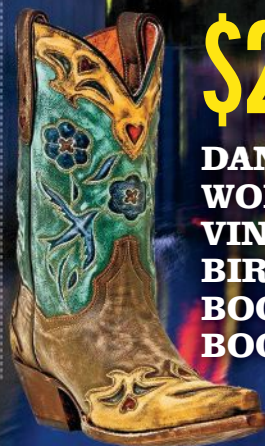


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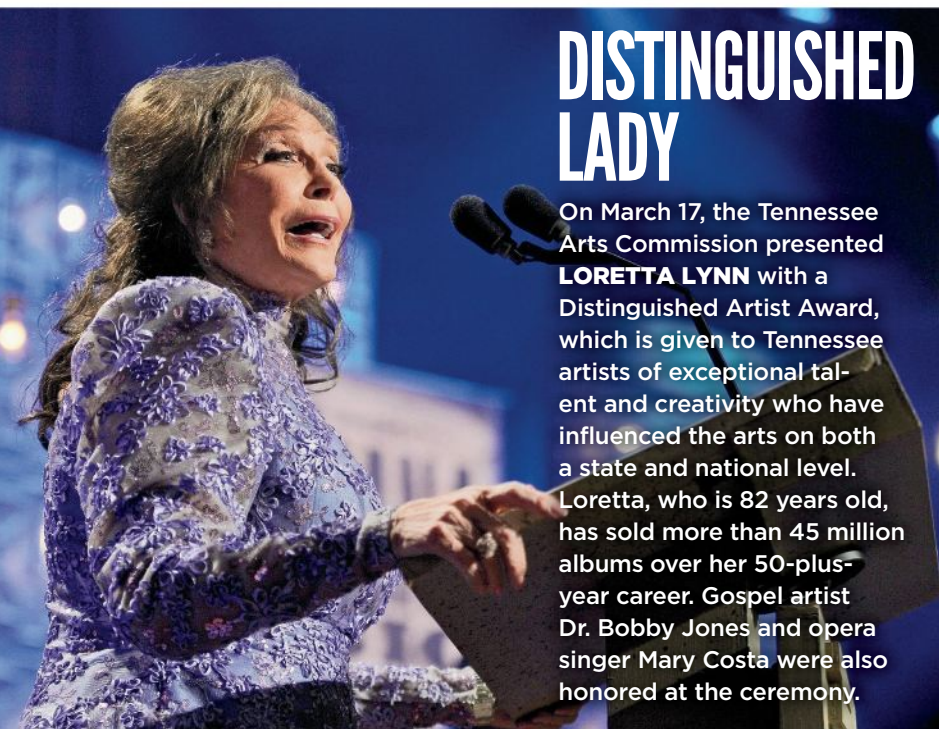
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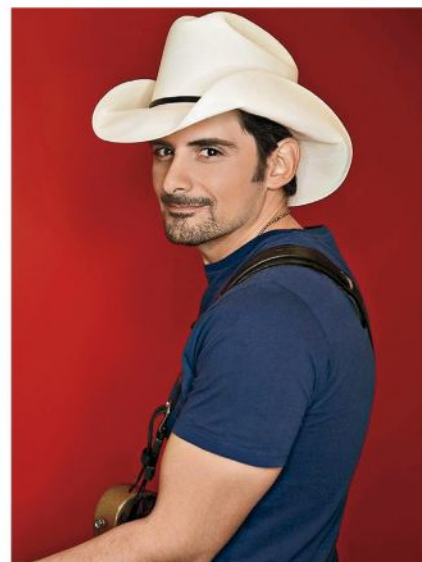


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DISTINGUISHED LADY

On March 17, the Tennessee Arts Commission presented **LORETTA LYNN** with a Distinguished Artist Award, which is given to Tennessee artists of exceptional talent and creativity who have influenced the arts on both a state and national level. Loretta, who is 82 years old, has sold more than 45 million albums over her 50-plus-year career. Gospel artist Dr. Bobby Jones and opera singer Mary Costa were also honored at the ceremony.



You Da Men

BRAD PAISLEY, FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE and **HUNTER HAYES** were

among the winners of the 2015 YouTube Music Awards. Recognized for having the largest growth in views, subscribers and engagement on the video platform over the last six months, the three country heavy-hitters joined 47 other acts across all genres, including **BEYONCÉ, ONE DIRECTION, RIHANNA, SIA** and **SAM SMITH**.



Bluegrass State of Mind

VINCE GILL and **THE TIME JUMPERS** will serve as the entertainment for the Mayor's Gala at the International Bluegrass Music Museum in Owensboro, Ky., on April 17. Proceeds from the gala will benefit the museum, which is the world's only facility dedicated to the history and preservation of bluegrass music. Check out bluegrassmuseum.org for ticket info.



WHAT'S THAT? ADDS

After a song has been released to radio, the real game begins. Rarely does every reporting station—the stations that have airplay recorded for country chart purposes—jump on a new single at once. The ones that don't are called by the record label's promotion teams, who ask, encourage and maybe even beg them to "add" the single. And no, those enticements do not involve money. That's called payola, and it's a federal crime. They count on their good relationships and an artist's proven history or the buzz around an up-and-comer to get the add.

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BACK IN THE SADDLE

WHEN YOU ARE ON THE ROAD

as much as Randy Houser, time is of the essence when it comes to the hours spent at home. That same mentality also translates into Randy's songwriting, where he knows right away when he's spending too much time on a song that won't necessarily be a good fit for him and also when a song has potential to be a hit. "I don't get to write songs every day like I used to," notes Randy. "If you're going to spend time writing a song, it almost has to be something you love."

Knowing he had his third album to complete, Randy got together with a handful of songwriters to start chipping away at ideas. One of those writers was Brice Long, who invited Randy to his office in the Berry Hill area of Nashville to see what they

could come up with. After going through several concepts and having no luck, the two broke for lunch to see if stepping away from the writing room would help spark something to write upon their return. "Brice is one of those writers who is very patient with me and doesn't get offended if I shoot down a lot of ideas until we collectively come up with the right thing and the right thing to say," Randy explains.

When they finally settled back into a groove that afternoon, they began playing through different melodies and guitar riffs when the opening line of their song came out: *Every time I fall I get back up again*. "It reminded me of how I was traveling all the time, then trying to come back home and keep juggling all the

"LIKE A COWBOY"

← Performed by
Randy Houser

→ Written by
Randy Houser,
Brice Long



A LONG STRING OF HITS


In addition to being a co-writer on "Like a Cowboy," Brice Long also co-wrote Randy's debut hit, "Anything Goes," back in 2008. He is also a co-writer on Gary Allan's 2004 chart-topping single "Nothing On but the Radio."

pieces and trying to make things work," Randy says softly. "It's just hard to do. I thought about anybody who's used to being away from home. You're out living your life and trying to stay in touch with what's going on at home. Meanwhile, this whole life is going on at home that you can't be a part of. You miss them and they miss you. It's a struggle that a lot of people go through."

That feeling and emotion led Randy to reflect on another lifestyle that might have involved the same scenario. "I just had a vision of the old-school cowboy riding in and saving the day, if that makes sense," Randy says. "I don't know if it's fairy-tale-like or what, but that's where it came from and it was something we both immediately loved."

They continued to work on "Like a Cowboy" for the remainder of the day, eventually putting the finishing touches on their new song. As Randy anticipated, the song made it onto his *How Country Feels* album, and it was released as the project's fourth single. It followed in the path of the previous tracks by becoming yet another Top 5 hit.

— ALANNA CONAWAY



**HANK
WILLIAMS, JR**



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FOLLOW THE TREND: Bohemian Buzz

Whether you call it bohemian, gypsy, peasant or hippie chic, the new trend in fashion is sweeping the country and country music. Think natural fibers and colors, comfortable and loose fit, feminine details of lace, flowers, delicate patterns and floaty, flowing hems and sleeves. Hair, too, should hang naturally, whether straight, wavy or curly, or be swept up with a simple headband or flowers. And makeup should enhance your own natural beauty with just a blush of color on the cheeks and lips, and a delicate sweep of mascara on the lashes. Love it? Spend a little, spend a lot, just embrace your inner hippie chick. Peace.

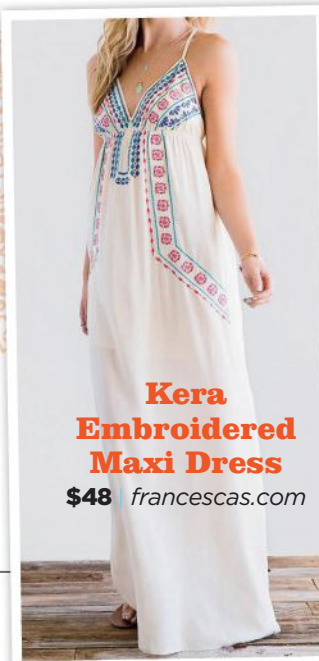
— TAMMY RAGUSA



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The National Amateur Poetry Competition is now accepting entries for our next contest. We encourage new, previously unpublished poets to participate. All qualifying poets will receive an editorial acknowledgement from an editor. Poem must be 26 lines or fewer (**line limit is strictly enforced!**) and can be written on any subject, in any style. Mail one original poem to

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Entry is free!

Pancake Party

NEWCOMER **SARAH DUNN** SHARES A FAMILY RECIPE FOR PANCAKES, A PERFECT ADDITION FOR YOUR CREW'S EASTER BREAKFAST.

PHOTOS BY ASHLEY HYLBERT

AS SOON AS SARAH DUNN, lead vocalist for the Sarah Dunn Band, gets off the road, she can't wait to get into the kitchen. And that goes for this particular morning in Nashville, where Sarah and the band have stopped over at a friend's house after traveling all night from their Missouri home base. This is definitely one hungry crew, so Sarah takes command in the kitchen and proceeds to whip up a band favorite, her homemade pancakes.

"I always make these for the band when they come over to my house," says the bubbly singer, who also plays fiddle and mandolin. "I got the recipe from my grandmother and I have experimented with it and added to it." Her tastiest addition, she'll gladly share, is the malted milk mix. "I know it's unusual, but that gives it an awesome flavor. It has a little bit of a different texture." Sarah also loves adding blueberries or chocolate chips to the batter.

For a taste of their music, check out the Sarah Dunn Band's new single, "Bye Bye," released to radio and online outlets in March. And make sure to try Sarah's awesome pancakes, which you can whip up for your own crew on Easter Sunday, April 5.

— BOB PAXMAN



Sarah gets the proper ingredients together to feed her band members, (from left) Matt McHan, Roger Caple, David Montgomery and Scotty Bell.

Looks like another winning stack, judging by the satisfied grins.



Sarah Dunn's Pancakes

1 cup flour
 ¼ cup vanilla malted milk mix
 2 tbsp. sugar
 1 tsp. baking powder
 ½ tsp. baking soda
 ½ tsp. salt
 1 cup milk
 1 egg
 2 tbsp. melted butter
 1 tsp. vanilla

In a mixing bowl, **WHISK** together all dry ingredients.

ADD milk, eggs, butter and vanilla to dry mixture and **STIR** until semi-smooth batter forms.

DROP a ladleful (or ½ cup) of batter onto griddle sprayed with cooking spray.

COOK until bubbles form on batter surface, then **FLIP**.

COOK until golden on each side, **ADD** your favorite toppings and enjoy.



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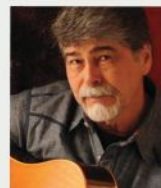
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Artists subject to change

MICHAEL RAY

CURRENT SINGLE:

"Kiss You in the Morning"

HOMETOWN:

Eustis, Fla.

WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW HIM:

Michael's debut single, "Kiss You in the Morning," was the second-most-added song at country radio during the third week of February, and the Florida native recently joined Sam Hunt's Lipstick Graffiti Tour.



STAGE PRESENCE

"When I was little, my family had a band called The Country Cousins and they played older country. My dad sang lead and played rhythm, my grandfather played lead guitar, my uncle played bass, my cousin played drums and a couple other cousins sang harmony. It was all family. They disbanded when I was 5 or 6, but I had been onstage with them since I was knee-high. I was up there playing my Kermit the Frog guitar that I thought was plugged in."

PRESS PLAY

"When I was 9 years old, I decided I wanted to play, so my dad and grandfather started showing me how to play guitar. It became my obsession, and I started playing with my grandfather on the weekends at community centers and American Legions. That's where I wanted to be, and I learned so much from performing at a young age, and performing classic country like Ray Price, Porter Wagoner, Bobby Bare, Earl Thomas Conley."

MUSIC CITY BOUND

"I moved to Nashville in 2010 and busted the

road and began playing every hole in the wall that I could. It was the old-school way of doing things—playing any club and handing out CDs. I just wanted to get out and play music, every place I could. It all came together a few years later when I signed with Warner Bros. All the hard work paid off."

BECOMING THE HUNTED

"Sam [Hunt] is a buddy of mine and one of the nicest guys around. He was nice enough to let me jump on the back end of his Lipstick Graffiti Tour to play some shows. It worked out great. It's going to be a lot of work, but it's not work when you love what you do. It's going to be so much fun. It's everything that I've dreamed about."

GRANDFATHERLY ADVICE

"My grandfather always said, 'Be careful of the feet you step on climbing up because they might be connected to the ass you have to kiss on your way down.' Treat people right, that's the main thing."

— JIM CASEY

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MORE HORSEPOWER

A THOUSAND HORSES IS READY TO KICK IT INTO GEAR.

STORY BY JIM CASEY



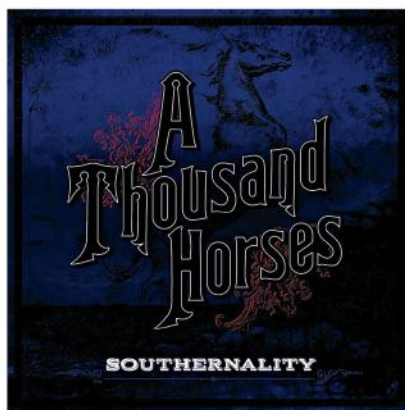
(From left) Graham DeLoach, Bill Satcher, Michael Hobby and Zach Brown



OPRY OPPORTUNITY

A Thousand Horses made their Grand Ole Opry debut on Feb. 24, playing two songs—"Smoke" and "Sunday Morning"—from their upcoming album, *Southernity*, which drops on June 9.

"It was awesome," says frontman Michael Hobby. "I checked it off my bucket list. I can't wait to go back. You can feel the energy when you step on that circle. Everyone who's come before you and everyone who will come after you, the history of it is amazing. It's my favorite show we've ever played, and we only played two songs."



(lead guitar), Zach Brown (guitar and vocals) and Graham DeLoach (bass and vocals)—to take in at the moment, while they refuel on assorted cocktails at the Tavern, a sleek gastropub in midtown Nashville. They use words like "crazy" and "unbelievable" to describe the success of "Smoke," a fresh take on an old vice—a toxic woman—that Michael co-wrote.

"It's insane," says Graham. "I pinch myself a lot. It hasn't even registered to us yet."

"Yeah, people keep saying, 'It's not supposed to happen like this,'" adds Bill. "We just want to get out

The concept of horsepower was developed in the 18th century to compare the output of steam engines to draft horses, but it seems a befitting metaphor for A Thousand Horses, a band that uses the building blocks of country, rock and blues to unleash lethal ballads and jammed-up anthems à la their Southern rock predecessors. Lynyrd Skynyrd had horsepower. Marshall Tucker Band? No doubt. The Black Crowes? Damn right.

Southern rock has always been about horsepower, and the pedal is down in 2015. You don't have to look much farther than a couple of *Billboard* charts for the burnt rubber. During the last week of February, Southern rockers Blackberry Smoke had the No. 1 country album, while A Thousand Horses' debut single, "Smoke," was cruising up the chart at No. 19. In fact, "Smoke" set a record for the highest debut by a new act when it opened at No. 28 on the *Country Aircheck* radio chart.

That's a lot for A Thousand Horses' four founding fathers—Michael Hobby (lead vocals), Bill Satcher

there and play it for people."

Newberry, S.C., buddies Michael and Bill began building the base of the band when they packed their bags and headed to Nashville in 2005. Bill's cousin Graham joined them a year later, while Zach completed the core in 2010 after meeting the guys through a friend of a friend. They didn't have a name when they united, so they adopted the moniker of one of the first songs they wrote, and they've been gaining steam ever since. In keep-



A Thousand Horses rocks the stage at the House of Blues in New Orleans in November 2014; (inset) backstage before their Grand Ole Opry debut in February 2015.

A THOUSAND HORSES CONTINUED

ing with the bigger-is-always-better theme of Southern rock, the guys increased their horsepower by adding more Horses, including three female backup singers, a fiddler and a keyboardist. That's a lot of people to pack onstage, or into a tour bus for that matter.

"Our bus is definitely a rolling party," says Michael, as we reconvene at a Music Row office three weeks after having drinks at the Tavern. "It's a 300-square-foot apartment with 12 people in it." It's even more crowded when you realize that bassist Graham is 6 feet 3 inches tall, while frontman Michael is a towering 6 feet 4 inches and generally sports a Wyatt Earp-esque cowboy hat that cuts an imposing presence onstage.

Regardless of the cramped quarters, when you get all those Horses under the roof, they power down the road, which is exactly what they'll be doing in May when they open for Darius Rucker on his Southern Style Tour.

"This is our first big, legit summer tour," says Michael. "We are totally pumped to get this thing kicked off on May 14."

"Yeah, right now we are putting together our party box [see sidebar] for the road," adds Zach with a laugh. "You know, all the stuff we'll need out there."

One thing that is definitely in the party box is a sound system,

because A Thousand Horses wants to be able to blast their new album, *Southernity*, which will be released June 9. The 13-track offering, which was produced by Dave Cobb (Jason Isbell, Sturgill Simpson), has the muscle to lay the hammer down on songs like ground-shaker "Landslide" or moon-howler "Trailer Trashed." But the guys also know when to downshift, like on the addictive lead single, "Smoke," or the virtuous "Sunday Morning," which they co-wrote with Rich Robinson of The Black Crowes.

"It's essentially five years of songs," says Bill. "'Landslide' was written four or five years ago. 'Smoke' was the last song written for the album. Two days before we went in to record, Michael showed up with this song and we were like, 'Wow. That's going on the album.'"

"*Southernity* is our journey," echoes Michael. "We've been writing and playing those songs for the last five years. It's our journey since forming."

From the sound of things, A Thousand Horses' journey is only beginning. Fans can preorder *Southernity* on iTunes and download four songs instantly, including "Smoke." But the best way to preview the album is by catching the band live. There is no shortage of horsepower. **CW**

Thinking Inside the Box

When the guys from A Thousand Horses got the call to join Darius Rucker's Southern Style Tour on May 14, they immediately began to construct their "party box," a collection of festive necessities for those days on the road.

"Right now, we've got a bunch of yard games like corn hole and ladder golf," says guitarist Zach Brown. "But we've also got a stereo system, grill, tailgate chairs, canopy, cooler. It's gonna be a big-ass box. It's a work in progress."



NASH
MAGAZINE

16
*Extra
Pages!*

BEHIND THE
SCENES WITH
**SUNNY
SWEENEY**

**CASEY
JAMES**
CHECKS
YES OR NO

**DARIUS
RUCKER**
TALKS
SPORTS
AND
MUSIC

GRAND CHAMPION

**CARRIE UNDERWOOD TAKES THE
PRIZE IN NASH'S FIRST ANNUAL
MUSIC MADNESS TOURNAMENT**



**SUNNY SWEENEY
and WILL HOGE
get emotional
on the video
shoot for
“My Bed.”**

PHOTOS BY TYLER ANDREWS

As Tears Go By

THE CONCEPT COULDN'T BE simpler: A man and a woman, an ardor cooled to flickering embers. And as the centerpiece in this tableau, the bed—once an altar to their passion and now a measure of the distance between them.

That's heavy stuff, but that's not why Sunny Sweeney is shedding tears between takes on her video shoot for the song “My Bed,” from her most recent album, *Provoked*. It's because the director of the shoot, Michael Poncé, has asked, “OK, Sunny, wanna do some tears?”

The artist is perched on a corner of the bed inside Elite Multimedia, a production company in Nashville. A camera stands on a tripod, maybe a foot away from her face. Lights illuminate Sunny, the metaphorical furniture and a bustling video crew within this vast, otherwise darkened room.

She thinks for a second and then replies, “I think so.”

Hair and makeup specialist Neil Robison steps up and brushes a bit of Mehron Sweat & Tears, a glycerin compound, beneath Sunny's left eye. “This will be ready to go immediately,” he advises the director, and in fact, a trickle is already glistening on her cheek.

“It's, like, slimy,” Sunny observes.

Michael is now setting up the next shot, in which duet partner Will Hoge, seated on the far side of the bed, is supposed to stand and walk out of the frame at the end of the song, with Sunny turning mournfully toward him on the lyric *Baby, where did we go wrong?*

But the director, jumbling his words, says, “Sunny, don't forget to turn the baby.” Sunny, Will and the crew laugh, relax and then, moments later as cameras roll, the tears fall and the solemnity of the moment is achieved.

A few minutes later, during a break in the action, Sunny reflects on the very personal meaning of the song. “I would never wish divorce on even my worst enemy. . . . No, I *would* wish it on her,” she corrects herself, with a sly grin. “But aside from her, I would not wish it on anybody. It is the worst thing you can ever go through, in my opinion. I will always have some pain from that, even though I'm happily married and have moved on. But I can always go



The director helps create tension for the “My Bed” video by putting Sunny and Will on opposite sides.



back to that—and I do, on songs like this. The pain stays with you. And that does guide my performance.”

When she wrote “My Bed” with Ashley Monroe and Angaleena Presley, Sunny wasn’t thinking of it as the duet it would eventually become. “We wrote it for just one person,” she explains. “I actually performed it in my shows for years. I’ve wanted to record it for a long time. Though he doesn’t want to take credit for it, it was my manager Steve Emley’s idea to make it a duet. And then he tossed out Will Hoge’s name and I was like, ‘Yes! That’s definitely going to be it.’”

For Will, the opportunity to record this song with Sunny was irresistible. “Sunny had been out on tour with me and my band,” he recalls. “We had gotten to spend some time together, so there was already some trust in our relationship, which makes it a whole lot easier to sing a song with someone.

“But also, the minute I heard this

song, I knew it would give me a chance to sing in a way that I don’t get to do as often as I’d like to,” he continues. “It just reminded me of those classic George Jones and Tammy Wynette heartbreak country ballads that I love. That’s not something we always get to do. And also, at the end of the day, this is on a Sunny Sweeney record. I’m not feeling like I have to carry the weight and focus the song.”

“I feel actually the same way,” Sunny adds. “It takes some pressure off of me to have somebody else. Like Will said, we’ve played shows together and we’re friends outside of this, so even though he’s saying he feels like a sideman, I feel like a sideman, too. I’ve done harmonies on albums but never a full-on duet, where he’s just as important to the song as I am.”

Their roles in the video are pretty much equal, too, a concept that was cooked up by the director and Sunny’s management. But the director is

more than open to input from both performers. Throughout the morning, he moves them like chess pieces: first Sunny closer to the camera and Will in the background. They switch when Will sings his lines. Different endings are shot, with each artist walking out of the picture on the last line. Then Sunny comes up with a question.

“Is there any necessity of shooting the empty bed?” she asks.

Michael considers the idea and then responds, “We could do that.”

With that, crew members move it to set up a different camera angle. Production assistant Lindsey Daniel fusses over the covers and blankets, sculpting the perfect “sad bed” look.

“It’s pretty loose,” Sunny says afterward, reflecting on the day of filming. “It’s pretty chill, which is a great feeling.”

Then, with a trace of glycerin tears still on her cheek, she laughs. “I’m having a really good day today.”

— BOB DOERSCHUK



Casey James

We asked the “Fall Apart” singer to keep it together long enough for a quick round of Check Yes or No, and he happily obliged.

I ate paste in elementary school.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I would like to cliff dive.

YES ☒ NO ☐

It drives me crazy when girls ask to touch my hair.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I've eaten food outside the door of someone else's hotel room.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I've eaten off of someone else's plate.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I've Googled my own name this month.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I work out at least three times a week.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I still high-five.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I have more than 10 phone numbers memorized.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I failed my driver's license test the first time.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I know CPR.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I can do a cartwheel.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I like clowns.

YES ☐ NO ☒

I've milked a cow.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I'm ticklish.

YES ☒ NO ☐

I believe in karma.

YES ☒ NO ☐

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CHAMPIONS

WITH A
PERFORMANCE
AS COMMANDING
AS HER VOICE,
CARRIE UNDERWOOD
RAN AWAY WITH
OUR INAUGURAL
NASH MUSIC
MADNESS CONTEST.

When we came up with the idea to let YOU—the readers—decide which one of the 16 hottest stars in country music had the best “season” in a winner-takes-all tournament, we took our staff’s opinions out of the equation. After coming up with a list of factors that governed the seeding, our job was done. It was time to sit back and let you vote. And vote you did. For the last month, thousands of votes poured in each round until we were left with one woman standing: Carrie Underwood.

And what a spectacular season it’s been for Carrie. Not only did she drop her fifth consecutive *Billboard* No. 1 album, win a Grammy and earn an ACM Special Achievement Award, but she also developed her own clothing line

and welcomed her first child into the world, a baby boy named Isaiah.

While other artists like Miranda Lambert, Luke Bryan and Blake Shelton certainly had unbelievable seasons, it’s hard to argue against Carrie’s remarkable run.

In fact, when it came down



to head-to-head matchups, Carrie left little doubt who the victor would be. Carrie conquered Keith Urban in the opening round, blasted Blake Shelton in the quarterfinals, routed Miranda Lambert in the semifinals and crushed Kenny Chesney in the finals. That’s a who’s who of country powerhouses who all served as mere cannon fodder for Carrie on her Sherman-like march through the tourney. And the best part is that the tournament was all done in good fun with your help.

We’re already looking forward to another great tourney next year. Can Carrie repeat her championship run and start her own dynasty or will a new titleholder emerge? The new season begins now, and we’ll be watching.

SHIP FORM



(Clockwise from above) *Greatest Hits: Decade #1*; with CMA Awards co-host Brad Paisley; performing at the ACC Awards; backstage with The Swon Brothers at the ACM Honors



(Clockwise from right) Sporting CALIA, her new fitness clothing line; muggin’ with Miranda Lambert in “Somethin’ Bad”; showing off her baby bump on the red carpet at the ACC Awards



NASH MUSIC MADNESS?

THE SUPER 16



64%



36%



34%



66%



35%



65%



41%



59%

THE GREAT 8



56%



44%

THE WEST



55%



45%

THE FAB 4



15%



85%

THE FAB 4



85%

3. CARRIE UNDERWOOD (OKLAHOMA)

- Grammy Best Country Solo Performance
- ACM Special Achievement Award
- Billboard No. 1 album

And then there were two Music Madness brackets. thousands of votes from comes down to the West. Carrie Underwood, versus Kenny Chesney. Carrie Urban, No. 2 Blake Shelton. Lambert to win the West. posed of No. 3 Jason Aldean.

THE FAB 4



3. CARRIE UNDERWOOD (OKLAHOMA)



FGL BY ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ/NICKELODEON; BLAKE, DIERKS, M&T, JASON, SAM BY JOHN RUSSELL/CMA; GARTH BY VINCENT MUZIK/CORBIS; MIRANDA BY JASON MERRITT/ACM; KACEY BY ERIC HENDERSON/CORBIS; KACEY BY ALBERT FERREIRA/ABC; LUKE BY IMAGE SPACE INC/CORBIS; STURGILL BY TERRY WYATT/SHORE FIRE MEDIA; KENNY BY TAMMIE ARROYO/AFF; ERIC BY BYRON PURVIS/CORBIS; TIM BY DEBBY WONG/CORBIS

In honor of college basketball's craziest month, *NASH* created a bracket with 16 of the hottest solo/duo acts in country music. We seeded them based on the strength of their current "season" and pitted them against each other in a winner-takes-all format that features East vs. West. We asked our readers to vote, and here are the results.

THE CHAMPION



IE
RWOOD
(AHOMA)

MAGAZINE



15%

KENNY CHESNEY (TENNESSEE)

- ACC Groundbreaker Award
- *Billboard* No. 1 album
- RIAA platinum song

win the East. Pipe with upsets, but found ways to perse- stars will finish the head in our first win- c Madness. Not only ging rights for the inaugural champion next week's *NASH* vote.

THE FAB 4



1.

36%

THE GREAT 8



1.

64%



4.

36%

THE SUPER 16



1.

74%



8.

26%



5.

45%



4.

55%



6.

60%



3.

40%



7.

51%



2.

49%

THE EAST



6.

64%



6.

70%



7.

30%

Screen Sizzlers

Music videos have the ability to enhance an artist's profile. They can also absolutely light us up with their inventive and creative visuals. These five music videos from some of country's hottest stars have us watching over and over again, whether for their compelling stories, beautiful cinematography or, honestly, just the dang good songs!

— TAMMY RAGUSA



Miranda Lambert

Video: "Little Red Wagon"

Director: Trey Fanjoy

Plot: As if the desert wasn't already hot enough, Mrs. Shelton shows up in a shiny Airstream with a pup by her side at a roadside hotel, looking as hot as an Alberto Vargas pinup girl for a few cheeky setups and some harmless flirtation with the pool boy.

Sam Hunt

Video: "Take Your Time"

Director: Tim Mattia

Plot: Dark, gritty and, sadly, too true, Sam Hunt shows that not every knight in shining armor is surrounded by opulence as he rescues an offbeat damsel in distress from an abusive loser.



Reba McEntire

Video: "Going Out Like That"

Director: TK McKamy

Plot: Reba plays narrator in this getting-over-you smash. But there's plenty of the feisty redhead performing (and looking amazing) between shots of the "life of the party" relearning what it is to go out like that.



CMT aired its very first video March 5, 1983—Faron Young's "It's Four in the Morning."

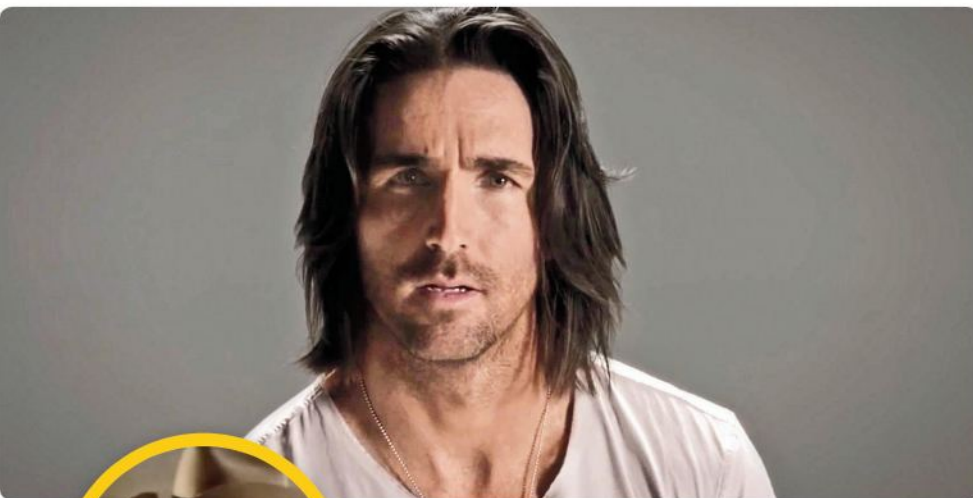


Jake Owen

Video: "What We Ain't Got"

Director: Mason Dixon

Plot: Stark and haunting, images of Jake sitting on a stool are interspersed with riveting images of individuals each bearing their own pain and burden, including a small boy with a folded flag. And the emotion builds as the clip unfolds. One of the most compelling videos in country music.



The first country music video to air on MTV? Dwight Yoakam's "Honky Tonk Man."

Cole Swindell

Video: "Ain't Worth the Whiskey"

Director: Michael Monaco

Plot: Props to Michael Monaco and Cole for not taking the easy way out by following the story line verbatim. The breakup in this song almost takes a supporting role as the celebration of a buddy returning home from military service becomes the star. Raise your glasses, y'all!





Darius Rucker (center) puts a smile on the faces of (from left) Chuck Wicks, Mike McVay (SVP of content and programming for Cumulus Media), Terri Clark and Blair Garner of America's Morning Show.

More Mr. Nice Guy

*There's just something about **Darius Rucker's** Southern Style charm that brings a smile to everyone's face.*

If you put together a list of the nicest people in country music, Darius Rucker's name would definitely be on the short list. His laugh and joy for life are infectious. I can honestly say I don't think I've ever seen Darius when he doesn't act like it's a sunny, blue-skied day. His happiness carries over from his music to his love of sports.

Darius once told me he had one room with nine televisions in it. Nine. Why would you need that? According to Darius, it's so you don't have to miss any of the games. He's got the NBA package . . . the NHL package . . . all of it.

When I recently asked him if he still had all the televisions, I was surprised when he said no. Only one. The hitch is that it's one television that's the size of an entire wall. "We can simultaneously play eight different games," Rucker says. "And I guess I've become accustomed to it because I had a friend over, and after about 15 minutes, he was in the bathroom sick

from all the motion."

Who in country music does Darius most closely follow the games with? "Oh, me and Dallas. Dallas Davidson and Luke [Bryan]," he says. "We text each other on Saturday with our picks." And fantasy football? "Absolutely. I've got five leagues and I'm the commissioner of every league. I even won the Nashville league this year." So what do you win? Darius told me, "I've got this guy that does all the belts for the WWE and he's made me a real wrestling belt that we pass around." And then with a sly grin he adds, "And money! The belt's cool, but the money's cooler."

If you could bet on the success of music, Darius would be one of the best bets you could make. "Home-grown Honey" is just the latest in a long string of his hits that have dominated the country charts. And though he first established himself with Hootie & the Blowfish, he has definitely become an established name in the realm of country music, too.

"My whole goal was just to get to make another record," Darius admits on a recent visit to *America's Morning Show*. "And it's been so much fun getting to be a part of the Nashville community. It's awesome." With four country albums now under his belt, plus an induction into the Grand Ole Opry, it's safe to say that Darius Rucker is without a doubt a bona fide country artist.

As for where his music is going next, Darius' fourth country album, *Southern Style*, will be released on March 31. I was lucky enough to get an advanced listen, and I knew from the moment I heard it I would be buying it for myself. The man can flat-out sing. Make sure to check out the title track and "Need You More," which are two of my favorites.

And if you need an extra shot of Darius, he's heading out in May on his Southern Style Tour with Brett Eldredge, Brothers Osborne and A Thousand Horses.

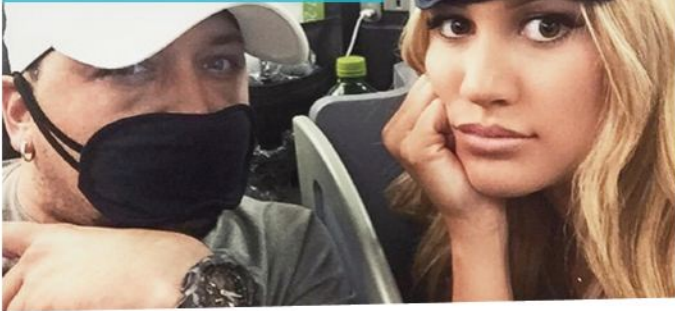


Blair Garner, a member of the National Radio Hall of Fame, is host of the **NASH-FM** nationally syndicated *America's Morning Show*.

NASH | *ON the SCENE*

OUT AND ABOUT WITH YOUR FAVORITE STARS!

When you're constantly "Burnin' It Down," there's only one way to prevent smoke inhalation for Jason Aldean and fiancée Brittany Kerr.



With their new tattoos, tourmates Miranda Lambert, Gwen Sebastian and RaeLynn prove there's not a bad note among them.



Even Tim McGraw's kids were impressed with his Oscar-night performance.



And this guy calls himself the reigning CMA Entertainer of the Year.



One more haircut this month, and Jake Owen gets a free scalp massage and pedicure.



Just remember, Kellie, aim small, miss small.





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NASH | SOUND BITES

WHAT YOUR FAVORITE STARS ARE SAYING ON NASH-FM

I'm trying to teach them the things that I was taught as a kid. You know, be respectful, say "yes, ma'am," "yes, sir." You know, be courteous to others.

DARIUS RUCKER

on how he's raising his kids

Do y'all remember the Colgate Country Showdown? I won one of those. I won the local one and then my drummer quit the band and disqualified us from the state.

LUKE BRYAN

We poured our whole hearts into Start Here and I cannot wait to just show our fans the whole Maddie & Tae spiel.

MADDIE MARLOW

of Maddie & Tae about their debut album

I put myself to a huge test with this show, because the standard of show that's gotta go in Caesars Palace, like a full-time resident, is major. It's like nothing I'd ever done before.

SHANIA TWAIN

on her Las Vegas show

Anytime you've got a song that's out on the radio at the time, that one is gonna get a big reaction at the show 'cause it's the one people are hearing 10 times a day on the radio, so that's good.

JASON ALDEAN

on performing "Just Gettin' Started" on tour

I've actually become better and more on time now as a mom, and even as our career has gone on and more years into it, they've rubbed off on me in a really good way.

HILLARY SCOTT

of Lady Antebellum about her bandmates' influence

AMERICA'S MORNING SHOW
WITH **BLAIR GARNER**

KICKIN' IT
WITH **KIX BROOKS**

**MUSIC CITY
HOT SPOTS**



THE REDNECK COMEDY BUS TOUR

If you're heading to Nashville for a long weekend of fun but don't know where to begin to see the sights, start by checking out the Redneck Comedy Bus Tour. Half tour of Music City and half built-in comedy show, the Redneck Bus, a converted and camouflaged school bus, takes passengers of all ages on a fun and hilarious ride to see the real sights and hear the best stories—and jokes—from hosts and drivers who know. The approximately two-hour tour is music-centric, covering Nashville's historic Printers Alley, Lower Broadway and 2nd Avenue honky-tonk district, but also loops Music Row, the home of the city's country music industry.

Pack a cooler—yep, really—and go before you leave, because once those wheels get rolling, they aren't stopping until you're done.

— TAMMY RAGUSA

BUS STOPS

LOCATION:
Nashville Palace
2611 McGavock Pike
HOURS:
Monday–Thursday
11 a.m.
Saturday
11 a.m.

LOCATION:
Whiskey Bent Saloon
306 Broadway
HOURS:
Monday–Thursday
2 p.m.
Saturday
2 p.m. & 4 p.m.

(615) 316-0014
theredneckbus.com





The Survivor

WHAT'S THE SECRET BEHIND **GARY ALLAN'S** LONGEVITY? STAYING TRUE TO HIMSELF.

Gary Allan, like Shakespeare's Cassius, still bears that "lean and hungry look" at age 47. Sporting a jeans-casual outfit adorned with a ball cap, Gary appears very much in fighting shape as he takes a seat inside a Nashville sound studio. He's excited to be coming out swinging with a new and acclaimed single, "Hangover Tonight," and upcoming album, along with plenty of touring for the rest of the year.

It may seem hard to entirely fathom, but Gary's on the verge of celebrating 20 years in the most difficult of trades: the music business. The raspy-voiced singer out of California made his debut in the summer of 1996 with "Her Man," which gave listeners a first glimpse into his soulful, and certainly sensual, sides. And though industry awards and statuettes haven't filled up his mantel, Gary has succeeded in two of the most important areas—loyal fan base and longevity. The latter has remained his goal ever since he embarked on this unpredictable career two decades ago.

BY
BOB
PAXMAN



GARY ALLAN CONTINUED

"In my eyes, success is longevity," says Gary, in a reflective tone. "When people asked me back when I started, 'What do you want?' I would always say longevity, and that's still the same. I'd like to be that Willie Nelson type of guy who just keeps on going." With a wraparound grin, Gary pokes a little fun at himself, adding, "You know, 20 years from now, I want people saying, 'How is that guy still here?' That wouldn't bother me. That's what I still want—to be writing and recording relevant songs and still have your hat in the game."

Gary's latest offering, "Hangover Tonight," is one of those wheelhouse songs perfectly matched for Gary's style. The melody sways to

a Motown-esque groove combined with a touch of Philly soul, delivered with Gary's blues-tinged rasp and sexy swagger.

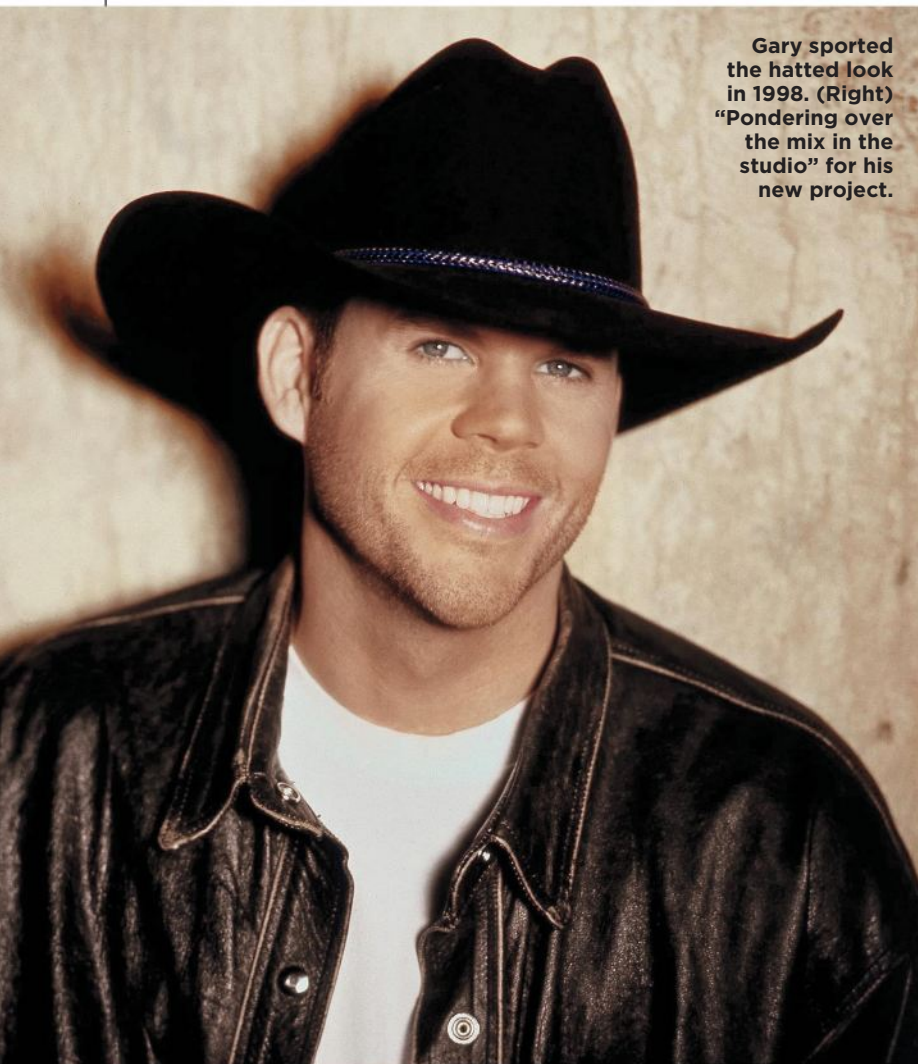
And to his point of staying relevant, Gary wrote the tune with three relatively younger artists, Chris Stapleton, Jesse Frasure and Cary Barlowe. The single is the lead track from Gary's next album, due later this year.

"I just really felt like we needed something fresh [for the album]," Gary explains. "We had finished most of the record and I didn't feel like we had that." Gary had admired an earlier song that Chris and Jesse had written, one that he thought he had wrapped up in the bag. But not to be.

"Chris and Jesse had written this kind of Motown thing and I thought

I had it for my record," Gary begins. "But then, I didn't have it. My manager said why don't I try to write something with those two in that vein." Gary got together with Chris and Jesse, bringing Cary on board, and the result accomplished the musical mission. "This was actually the last song we wrote for the album," Gary says. "It's exactly what we were going for. Chris and Jesse and I ended up writing two others and both of those made the record."

Throughout his career, Gary has never been one to avoid taking new steps. He's pushed himself vocally at times with cuts like the emotional "Best I Ever Had," a cover of the Vertical Horizon hit, and "Life Ain't Always Beautiful," a wrenching number if one



Gary sported the hatted look in 1998. (Right) "Pondering over the mix in the studio" for his new project.



ever existed. For his 2013 album, *Set You Free*, Gary collaborated for the first time with female writers, including Hillary Lindsey on the No. 1 single “Every Storm (Runs Out of Rain)” and Sarah Buxton on “Pieces.” He’s open to fresh experiences, perhaps one more reason why he has stayed not only active but also relevant at the same time. Teaming up with the three writers on “Hangover Tonight” proved one more example of his willingness to be flexible, even when the processes aren’t the same.

“It was very different writing with Chris and them,” Gary acknowledges with a smile. “I remember Chris being a really fast writer. Chris had written a lot with Jesse, who is a DJ, and that was different itself. Jesse had speakers set up facing me and he had a little laptop with the beats and the chord progressions and the instruments on there. We basically put melodies over what he did. Which was very odd—I had never written like that. I mean, I still write in notebooks,” he adds with a generous poke at himself. “In fact, we were all laughing about how much country music has changed as we were writing. They all came in with their computers and I walk in the studio with my notebooks and they’re all kind of laughing at me.”

Gary describes it all in good-natured fashion, even fessing up to one more nod to the old-school method. “I always have songs and ideas written down,” he says, “and I also put things on cassettes. It’s easier for me to jot down ideas. I’ve lost so many songs to computers.”

But other than his nonreliance on technology, Gary is good with change. It comes from within, he will gladly confide. “First off, it’s me trying to push myself to do something different,” Gary says. “With this new single, I almost feel like I did when I had [the 1999 single] ‘Smoke Rings in the Dark.’ I got something that is so different that it’s either going to screw up my career,” he smiles, “or help it.”

Surely, “Hangover Tonight” works in well with today’s brand of country, where the spaces are more wide open than ever before. Listen to the majority of tunes that get whopping amounts of airtime and you’ll hear an infusion of sounds from outside the traditional boundaries of country.

“This is the most I’ve ever seen

New Fave

Fans aren’t the only folks raving over singer/songwriter **CHRIS STAPLETON**.

Gary Allan, who collaborated with Chris on three songs from his upcoming new album, has also been captivated by Chris’ writing and achingly soulful voice that can leap from Otis Redding to Screamin’ Jay Hawkins in a heartbeat. Chris co-wrote Gary’s current single, “Hangover Tonight.”

“He has become one of my favorite singers,” Gary, a soul-tinged vocalist himself, says. “All of the background vocals on ‘Hangover Tonight’ are his. When Chris layers his voice like that, it sounds like 15 black women from a choir. We’ve got him all over the record.”



country music change,” Gary muses as he sits back in his chair. “You have to look at it and say, ‘How am I going to fit into this?’ Especially now, with all the rapping and stuff like that. But when I heard this song, I thought I could get all over that. I’ve always got it in me to try something that I haven’t heard or done before. I think the opposite of that is you find yourself on the jaded side of the fence, and there’s no money on the jaded side.”

When not in the studio or on the stage, Gary tends to a thriving business, the hip clothing store he opened a few years ago in Nashville, The Label. The shop, located in the trendy neighborhood known as 12South, features an array of clothes and jewelry for both men and women. Gary’s fellow artists drop in often to buy that special, eye-catching garment for red carpets and awards show appearances. “We have a lot of tourists who also come through,” Gary says. “But mainly, any band that comes to town will come and see us.”

The Label has actually evolved into a family business. Gary’s daughters, Maggie, Dallas and Tanna, all play a big part in the day-to-day operation. “My oldest daughter does the books and a lot of the buying,” says the proud dad. “My youngest girl is still in college, but she comes in when she can. It’s always fun to watch the awards shows with them because they’ll see an artist and go, ‘I helped dress him,’ or something like that.”

Gary’s middle daughter, Dallas, once held aspirations of a singing career, and even performed with her dad during his 2009 show in Nashville at the Ryman Auditorium. The two harmonized on The Band’s classic “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down,” earning a crescendo of applause from the audience. But neither she nor her sisters show any sort of interest in following their dad down the entertainment trail.

“They all still like to play and



Gary performs on a 2013 episode of NBC's *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*.

GARY ALLAN CONTINUED sing but none of them want to do this for a living,” Gary says, gesturing toward his guitar case. “And I think it was because I was gone so much. In conversations with them, their take on it was that success means you’ll never see your family. And I said that’s true. But you have to decide what you want.”


He received a similar slice of ad-

vice from the legendary Buck Owens, one of Gary’s musical heroes. “Buck told me one time that you’re going to have to make sacrifices if you want this career,” Gary recalls. “One of the sacrifices is being gone all the time.”

Now that his three daughters are grown, Gary has more time to put in additional (and guilt-free) road dates. The schedule for the year is packed with concert and festival dates, but

there’s a new wrinkle he’d love to add. “What I want to do this year are more acoustic shows,” Gary explains. “I’d like to do some by myself or maybe just me and one or two other guys and just strip it all down.”

He’s performed such shows at Nashville club The Listening Room Cafe as well as for a recent benefit, Stars for Wishes. Fans, always Gary’s prime consideration, embrace the



**"I do
look back
on my
career
and say
I've
survived."**

intimate, more personal shows. "I have so much fun doing them and I always think, 'Man, we have to do more of these.' It's great to be able to do some album cuts and things like that," Gary says. "Anytime it's a charity, it's always an acoustic thing. But one day, I'd like to do a whole tour of just that. It's always fun to watch people play when they're in a stripped-down setting," he adds,

smiling wryly. "You can tell the ones who are being carried."

No such concerns for Gary, who's been carrying the load in workmanlike fashion since the 1990s. He knows that he's already beaten the odds many times over. To the question "Are you a survivor?" Gary answers in the affirmative.

"I do look back on my career and say I've survived," he reflects, mat-

ter-of-factly. "And I love the way I did it. I think I always did things the way I wanted to and even bucked convention sometimes. I wouldn't change one thing."

He looks around the sound room and breaks into a slight grin. "You know, I always said I wanted to be here for 20 years," he notes. "Now, I'm going to have to start saying 30." **CW**

GO FEST, YOUNG FANS!



No shoes, no shirt, no problems . . . just make sure you have a ticket to a few of country music's best summer festivals.

Get the fanny packs, sunscreen and sunglasses (and deodorant, please) ready—summer festival season is almost here, which means you have the opportunity to spend all day or several days enjoying the music of your favorite country singers in the company of fellow country music fans. From coast to coast, there's a festival for everyone, boasting the biggest names in the format, from hot contemporary stars to classic country legends. But don't forget, these festivals are also a great opportunity to meet and hear some of the brightest up-and-coming local, regional and national talent, so get there early. And check, check, then triple-check that you have your tickets, credentials AND CAMERA!

You won't want to miss one bit of the action or that once-in-a-lifetime photo op with Keith Urban.

Please note:
Prices noted include single-day and multiple-day admission for music. In most cases, there are separate fees for parking and/or camping. Check festival websites for pricing.



SUMMER FESTIVALS CONTINUED

Stagecoach Festival

WHERE: Indio, Calif.

WHEN: April 24-26

WEB: stagecoachfestival.com

WALLET: \$269-\$799

WHO: Blake Shelton, **TIM MCGRAW**, ZZ Top, Sturgill Simpson, Steve Earle, Miranda Lambert, Merle Haggard, Kip Moore, Jake Owen, Gregg Allman, Chris Janson and others

WHAT'S UP: Now in its ninth year of existence, the Stagecoach Festival (from the people behind Coachella) has one of the most eclectic lineups of major country stars and Americana/roots favorites.



Country Thunder Arizona

WHERE: Florence, Ariz.

WHEN: April 9-12

WEB: countrythunder.com

WALLET: \$75-\$190

WHO: Luke Bryan, Blake Shelton, Dustin Lynch, Brett Eldredge, Maddie & Tae, The Railers and others

WHAT'S UP: Get your summer partying off to an early start.



Band, Jake Owen, The Band Perry, Little Big Town, Trace Adkins, Josh Turner, The Mavericks, Colt Ford, Sam Hunt, Chase Rice, Frankie Ballard, Maddie & Tae and others

WHAT'S UP: A portion of the proceeds goes directly to Conservation Village, an organization that works to ensure ocean conservation and sustainable fishing.

Country Life Florida

WHERE: Punta Gorda, Fla.

WHEN: April 24-26

WEB: countrylifemusicfestival.com

WALLET: \$49-\$499

WHO: Reba McEntire, Hank Williams Jr., Billy Currington, Jamey Johnson, Big & Rich, Chris Young, Charlie Daniels, Tracy Lawrence, Gloriana, Love

and Theft, Craig Wayne Boyd and others

WHAT'S UP: The three-day gathering is being touted as the biggest country music fest to ever hit Southwest Florida, and it's the first major event to take place at Florida Tracks & Trails, a new 1,000-acre park.



Tree Town Music Festival

WHERE: Forest City, Iowa

WHEN: May 21-24

WEB: treetownfestival.com

WALLET: \$30-\$525

WHO: Rascal Flatts, Thomas Rhett, Lee Brice, Chase Rice, Dierks Bentley, Blake Shelton, Eli Young Band, Old Dominion and others



Tortuga Music Festival

WHERE: Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

WHEN: April 11-12

WEB: tortugamusicfestival.com

WALLET: \$165-\$1,299

WHO: Kenny Chesney, Zac Brown

WHAT'S UP: No surprise that they love some country music in the Heartland, and this Iowa festival brings the top-tier talent as well as the hottest rising stars.



Bayou Country Superfest

WHERE: Baton Rouge, La.

WHEN: May 23-24

WEB: bayoucountrysuperfest.com

WALLET: \$50-\$500

WHO: Kenny Chesney, Blake Shelton, Miranda Lambert, Brantley Gilbert, Tyler Farr, Kip Moore, Cassadee Pope and others

WHAT'S UP: You don't have to wear your purple and gold to attend this massive Memorial Day weekend festival at LSU Tiger Stadium; you just have to be ready to let them bon temps roll.

Carolina Country Music Fest

WHERE: Myrtle Beach, S.C.

WHEN: June 5-7

WEB: carolinacountrymusicfest.com

WALLET: \$189-\$999

WHO: Rascal Flatts, Eric Church, Lady Antebellum, Cole Swindell,

Big & Rich, Hunter Hayes, Colt Ford, Brooke Eden, Georgia Satellites and others

WHAT'S UP:

Pack your sunscreen and flip-flops—the \$6.4 million Myrtle Beach Boardwalk is the place to be for the inaugural Carolina Country Music Festival.



Taste of Country Music Festival

WHERE: Hunter Mountain, N.Y.

WHEN: June 12-14



WEB: tasteofcountryfestival.com

WALLET: \$165-\$615

WHO: Tim McGraw, Keith Urban, Toby Keith, Billy Currington, Eli Young Band, Jerrod Niemann, Sara Evans, Easton Corbin, Chase Bryant, Colt Ford and others

WHAT'S UP: Going into its third year, this festival has a wide range of attractions and camping options for the country music fan.

Rock the South

WHERE: Cullman, Ala.

WHEN: June 19-20

WEB: rockthesouth.com

WALLET: \$49-\$429

WHO: Alan Jackson, Brantley Gilbert, Travis Tritt, Tyler Farr, Eric Paslay, Sara Evans, Big Smo, Blackberry Smoke, Jon Pardi and others

WHAT'S UP: The festival started in 2012 as a way to celebrate recovery and rebuilding after a tornado

“rocked” the area in 2011. Last year, more than \$50,000 was raised for local charities.



Moondance Jammin Country Fest

WHERE: Walker, Minn.

WHEN: June 19-20

WEB: jammincountry.com

WALLET: \$155-\$375

WHO: Florida Georgia Line, Chris Young, Thomas Rhett, Old Dominion, Clare Dunn and others

WHAT'S UP: For those who want to get the good times off to an early start, check out the pre-Jam party the night before. Details on the website.



Shaky Boots Music Festival

WHERE: Kennesaw, Ga.

WHEN: May 16-17

WEB: shakyboots.com

WALLET: \$95-\$599

WHO: Dierks Bentley, **BLAKE SHELTON**, Brad Paisley, Rascal Flatts, Dwight Yoakam, Old Crow Medicine Show, Justin Moore, The Band Perry, Kip Moore, Joe Nichols, Jason Isbell, Eli Young Band and others

WHAT'S UP: The inaugural Shaky Boots Festival—a two-day event featuring more than 25 marquee country music artists—will make its debut at the KSU Sports and Entertainment Park in Kennesaw, Ga.



CMA Music Festival

WHERE: Nashville
WHEN: June 11-15
WEB: cmaworld.com/cma-music-festival
WALLET: \$175-\$385
WHO: Zac Brown Band, Lady Antebellum, Little Big Town, **JASON ALDEAN**, Darius Rucker, Cole Swindell, Dierks Bentley, Eric Church, Luke Bryan, Sam Hunt and others
WHAT'S UP: For an immersive country music experience like no other, downtown Nashville is the place to be in June.



Windy City LakeShake

WHERE: Chicago
WHEN: June 19-21
WEB: lakeshakefestival.com
WALLET: \$199.50-\$599.50
WHO: Dierks Bentley, Brad Paisley, Florida Georgia Line, Justin Moore, Easton Corbin, Frankie Ballard, Cassadee Pope, Joe Nichols and others



WHAT'S UP: It's the city's first major country music festival, set against the backdrop of the great Chicago skyline.

Country Fest 2015

WHERE: Cadott, Wis.
WHEN: June 25-28
WEB: countryfest.com
WALLET: \$82.50-\$500
WHO: Keith Urban, Toby Keith, Tim McGraw, Rascal Flatts, Billy Currington, Brett Eldredge, Lee Brice, The Swon Brothers, Rae-Lynn, Chase Rice
WHAT'S UP: Wisconsin country fans have numerous festival options in the month of June, and this one combines superstar acts with local favorites playing on side stages.



Country USA Oshkosh

WHERE: Oshkosh, Wis.
WHEN: June 23-27
WEB: countryusaoshkosh.com
WALLET: \$59-\$420
WHO: Miranda Lambert, Eric Church, Tim McGraw, Lee Brice, Thompson Square, Dustin Lynch, Brothers Osborne, Tyler Farr, Craig Campbell, Neal McCoy and others
WHAT'S UP: Organizers aren't messing about for this festival's 20th anniversary, bringing out the big guns for five full days of nonstop entertainment.

SummerFest

WHERE: Milwaukee
WHEN: June 24-28, June 30-July 5
WEB: summerfest.com
WALLET: \$12-\$45
WHO: Luke Bryan, Florida Georgia Line, Brad Paisley, Darius Rucker, Zac Brown Band, Keith Urban, Kip Moore, Cole Swindell, Thompson Square, Scotty McCreery, Blackberry Smoke and others
WHAT'S UP: The Guinness-certified World's Largest Music Festival spans 11 days, incorporates more than 800 acts and features attendees from 40-plus countries.



Kicker Country Stampede

WHERE: Manhattan, Kan.
WHEN: June 25-28
WEB: countrystampede.com
WALLET: \$140-\$550
WHO: Florida Georgia Line, Blake Shelton, Jerrod Niemann, Travis Tritt, Craig Morgan, Angaleena Presley, LOCASH and others
WHAT'S UP: More than 170,000 people attended the 2014 edition of this festival, held at Tuttle Creek State Park, within a day's driving distance of Topeka, Wichita and Kansas City.



Dauphin's Country Fest

WHERE: Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada

WHEN: June 25-28

WEB: countryfest.ca

WALLET: \$79-\$569

WHO: Miranda Lambert, Jake Owen, Brantley Gilbert, Tyler Farr and others

WHAT'S UP: Besides outstanding music, the festival offers contests and activities with cool prizes for winners.



Thunder on the Mountain

WHERE: Mulberry Mountain in Ozark, Ark.

WHEN: June 26-28

WEB: thunderonthemountain.com

WALLET: \$79-\$605

WHO: Carrie Underwood, The Band Perry, Zac Brown Band,

Sara Evans, Eli Young Band, Stoney LaRue and others

WHAT'S UP: The festival, now in its second year, is situated on 650 acres of rolling hills and beautiful national forest.

Big Barrel Country Music Festival

WHERE: The Woodlands of Dover International Speedway, Dover, Del.

WHEN: June 26-28

WEB: bigbarrel.com

WALLET: \$99-\$499

WHO: Blake Shelton, Carrie Underwood, Merle Haggard, Miranda Lambert, Loretta Lynn, Sturgill Simpson, Kacey Musgraves, Gary Allan, Chris Stapleton, Jake Owen and others

WHAT'S UP: You'll be jamming and dancing at the Dover International Speedway, a regular stop on the NASCAR circuit.



Calgary Stampede

WHERE: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

WHEN: July 3-12

WEB: calgarystampede.com

WALLET: \$49.50-\$250

(concerts only)

WHO: Miranda Lambert, Blake Shelton, Jason Aldean, Blackjack Billy, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Charlie Major and others

WHAT'S UP: This is a full-fledged rodeo and concert event, much like Houston Rodeo or NFR in the stages, with all of the cowbells and whistles, held at the namesake Stampede Park.



Country Life Illinois

WHERE: Chillicothe, Ill.

WHEN: July 17-19

WEB: countrylifemusicfestival.com

WALLET: \$54-\$339

WHO: Lynyrd Skynyrd, Keith Urban, Toby Keith, Travis Tritt, Joe Nichols, Sawyer Brown, Craig Wayne Boyd, Charlie Worsham,



FarmBorough

WHERE: Randall's Island, New York City

WHEN: June 26-28

WEB: farmboroughfestival.com

WALLET: \$225-\$999

WHO: Dierks Bentley, **BRAD PAISLEY**, Luke Bryan, Randy Houser, Chris Stapleton, Dwight Yoakam, Joe Nichols, Sturgill Simpson, Brandy Clark, Wade Bowen and others

WHAT'S UP: This is the very first three-day country music festival in New York City and it boasts over two dozen of country's biggest and brightest stars.

SUMMER FESTIVALS CONTINUED

Joe Diffie, RaelLynn and others
WHAT'S UP: This three-day music and camping festival at Three Sisters Park has a sister event that takes place in Punta Gorda, Fla.

Jamboree in the Hills



WHERE: Morristown, Ohio

WHEN: July 16-19

WEB: jamboreeinthehills.com

WALLET: \$60-\$220

WHO: Toby Keith, Dierks Bentley, Neal McCoy, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Justin Moore, Frankie Ballard, Lee Brice, Thomas Rhett and others

WHAT'S UP: This long-running country festival is nestled near Wheeling, W.Va., and Pittsburgh

and includes the free-for-all Red-neck Run to grab the best seats, so bring your sneakers.

Faster Horses

WHERE: Brooklyn, Mich.

WHEN: July 17-19

WEB: fasterhorsesfestival.com

WALLET: \$184-\$785

WHO: Brad Paisley, Carrie Underwood, Florida Georgia Line, Dustin Lynch, Justin Moore, Lee Brice, Mark Chesnutt, The Cadillac Three, Thomas Rhett and others

WHAT'S UP: An outdoor camping extravaganza featuring the best in live country music, the \$785 package is worth it for the open bar and restrooms.

Country Jam Wisconsin

WHERE: Eau Claire, Wis.

WHEN: July 23-25

WEB: countryjamwi.com

WALLET: \$100-\$1,500

WHO: Lady Antebellum, Hunter Hayes, Sam Hunt, Granger Smith, Blake Shelton, LOCASH, Eric Church, Gary Allan, Jerrod Niemann and others

WHAT'S UP: Last year, Country Jam's 25th anniversary was celebrated. They're celebrating the 26th with an even bigger lineup of stars.



Country Thunder Wisconsin

WHERE: Twin Lakes, Wis.

WHEN: July 23-26

WEB: countrythunder.com

WALLET: \$190

WHO: Dierks Bentley, Blake Shelton, Luke Bryan, Jerrod Niemann, Tyler Farr, Jon Pardi, The Swon Brothers and others

Watershed Music and Camping Festival

WHERE: George, Wash.

WHEN: July 31-Aug. 2

WEB: watershedfest.com

WALLET: \$199-\$750

WHO: Dierks Bentley, Florida Georgia Line, **CARRIE UNDERWOOD**, Easton Corbin, Gary Allan, Joe Nichols, Hunter Hayes, Mark Chesnutt, Sam Hunt, Thomas Rhett, Parmalee and others

WHAT'S UP: If there were an award for most scenic country festival, this annual gathering at the Gorge Amphitheatre, which overlooks the Columbia River, would win it every time.

WATERSHED
MUSIC Summer 2015 **CAMPING**



WHAT'S UP: If you couldn't make the earlier Country Thunder, you have another chance to experience the fun and magic in this beautiful setting.

Oregon Jamboree

WHERE:

Sweet Home, Ore.

WHEN: July 31-Aug. 2

WEB: oregonjamboree.com

WALLET: \$140

WHO: Keith Urban, Dierks Bentley, Thomas Rhett, Lee Brice, Big & Rich, Sam Hunt, Hunter Hayes, Aaron Tippin and others

WHAT'S UP: The 21-year-old Jamboree is an outdoor enthusiast's paradise, with camping available for attendees and fishing, hunting, rock climbing and more within reach. That is, if you can pull yourself away from the music.

WE Fest

WHERE: Detroit Lakes, Minn.

WHEN: Aug. 6-8

WEB: wefest.com

WALLET: \$129

WHO: Blake Shelton, Miranda Lambert, Rascal Flatts, Dierks Bentley, Hank Williams Jr., Jake Owen, Eli Young Band, Tyler Farr, Eric Paslay, Colt Ford, Randy Rogers Band and others

WHAT'S UP: Head to Detroit Lakes in the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes (get directions) for this 30-year-old gathering, possibly country music's northernmost festival in the United States.

Boots and Hearts

WHERE:

Oro-Medonte, Ontario, Canada

WHEN: Aug. 6-9

WEB: bootsandhearts.com

WALLET: \$199-\$599

WHO: Brad Paisley, Eric Church, Florida Georgia Line, Little Big Town, Dallas Smith, Justin Moore,



Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam

WHERE: Panama City Beach, Fla.

WHEN: Sept. 4-6

WEB: gulfcoastjam.com

WALLET: \$119-\$999

WHO: Keith Urban, MIRANDA LAMBERT, Lady Antebellum, Hunter Hayes, Sam Hunt and others

WHAT'S UP: The Jam might be your last chance to party for the summer, as it takes place Labor Day weekend.



Frankie Ballard, David Nail, Maddie & Tae, Canaan Smith and others

WHAT'S UP: Billed as the largest country festival in Canada, Boots and Hearts combines established superstars with exciting new talents and regional favorites.



Delaware Junction

WHERE: Harrington, Del.

WHEN: Aug. 14-16

WEB: delawarejunctionfestival.com

WALLET: \$199-\$799

WHO: Toby Keith, Jason Aldean, Cole Swindell, Florida Georgia Line, Frankie Ballard, Thomas Rhett, Tyler Farr, Kristian Bush,

The Cadillac Three and others

WHAT'S UP: It may be one of the smallest states in the Union, but Delaware packs some big-time country star power with this festival lineup.

Willamette Country Music Festival

WHERE: Brownsville, Ore.

WHEN: Aug. 14-16

WEB: willamettecountrymusicfestival.com

WALLET: \$50-\$145

WHO: Luke Bryan, Rascal Flatts, Scotty McCreery, Chris Young, The Band Perry, Dustin Lynch, Tracy Lawrence, Pam Tillis and others

WHAT'S UP: Nestled between Eugene and Salem, Brownsville, Ore., also served as the setting for the fictional town in the film *Stand by Me*. **CW**



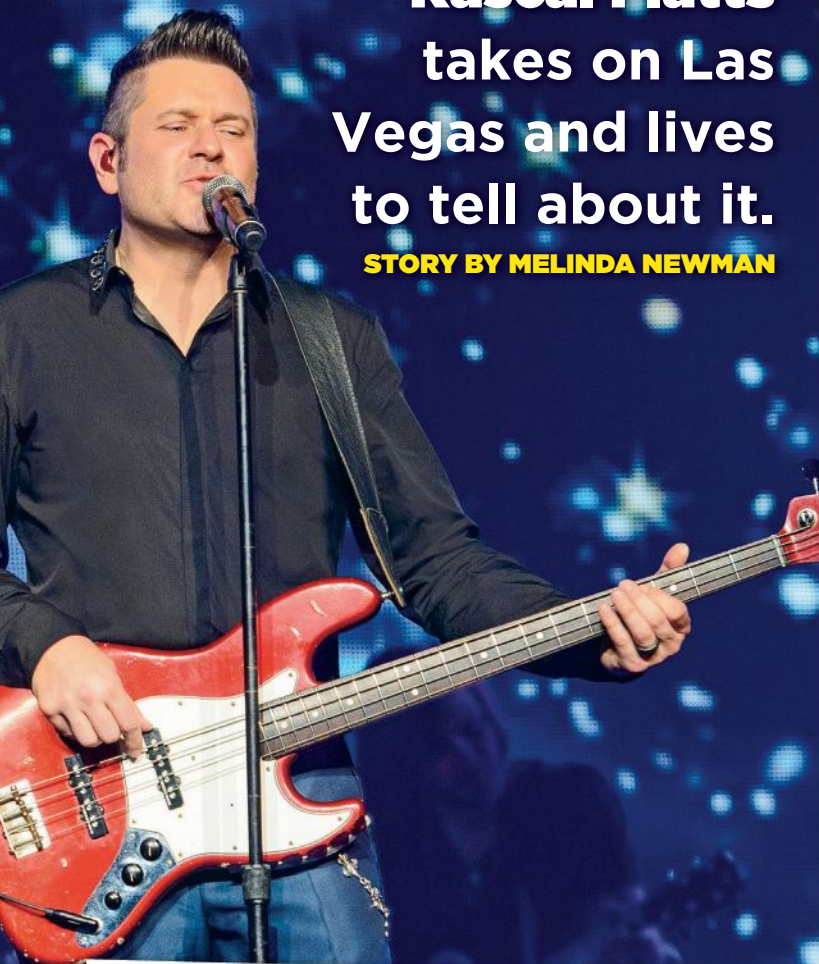
THREE OF A



KIND

Rascal Flatts takes on Las Vegas and lives to tell about it.

STORY BY MELINDA NEWMAN



RASCAL FLATTS RECENTLY completed a nine-date residency at The Joint at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, but the trio hopes the run served as the initial courtship leading up to a committed relationship.

"We'd certainly love to be out here more and they're very interested in having us," said bassist Jay DeMarcus, sitting in the balcony of the 4,200-capacity theater hours before the band's first show on Feb. 25. "We just need to date each other for a while before we get married. That's what we're out here doing."

Las Vegas greeted the band with open arms, welcoming them shortly before their opening-night concert with a serenade from the 40-piece Foothill High School marching band, which played "Fast Cars and Freedom" and "Life Is a Highway" as the three members made a grand entrance in NASCAR race cars.

"We're thrilled to death to be the first country residency at The Joint," said lead singer Gary LeVox. "I think it will open the doors for some other country acts to come in and take up residency, a great thing for our format and our genre of music." Though several country solo artists, including Garth Brooks, Shania Twain, and Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, have enjoyed residencies in Las Vegas, Rascal Flatts was the first country group to do so.

"It was perfect timing," said guitarist Joe Don Rooney. "We had this time off and our managers called us at the end of last summer and said, 'Is this something you think you want to do?' We were like, 'That's perfect!' It's nice to leave everything set up. We have the hotel rooms for three weeks."

During the run, which ended March 14, the band embraced Sin City: Gary and Rascal Flatts' opening act, *The Voice* champ Craig Wayne Boyd, served as celebrity shavers at the Hard Rock's St. Baldrick's Foundation's cancer charity fundraiser on March 7, and Rascal Flatts sang the national anthem at the Kobalt 400 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway on March 8.

The Las Vegas stint gave the band the chance to break in two new band members—"We just thought it was time to bring something different to the table," Gary said—as well as reimagine some of their big hits in a new light.

The highlight of the shows came when the trio, surrounded by their band, formed a semicircle to perform "Mayberry," "I'm Movin'



Rascal Flatts made their Las Vegas entrance in style: riding to the Hard Rock in NASCAR race cars and backed by a marching band.

PHOTO BY TODD OWYOUNG/THE GREEN ROOM/PR



(From left) Joe Don, Gary and Jay played a set of crowd-pleasing hits during their Las Vegas residency shows at The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel and Casino.



RASCAL FLATTS CONTINUED

On” and “Prayin’ for Daylight” in stripped-down, largely acoustic arrangements, with “Prayin’” recast as a bluegrass tune. “The concept was to bring a little bit of Nashville to Vegas,” Jay said. “[The residency] gave us the freedom to be creative with our music and present some songs in different ways.”

The concert packed in 20 hits in less than 90 minutes. “You want to hit them with the ones they want to hear,” Joe Don said. “There’s always a couple extra that might get thrown in or thrown out, but, hopefully at the end of the day, [the fans] are happy with what they heard and the way it was presented.”

The only downside? For Gary—or any vocalist—arid Las Vegas “is the worst place on the planet for a singer to be,” he said. “You just pray. You just try to stay hydrated. Try to sleep as much as you can, and less talking as you can.”

The Las Vegas dates coincided

with Rascal Flatts celebrating the 15th anniversary of debut single “Prayin’ for Daylight.” Since then, the band has sold nearly 23 million albums and scored 15 No. 1 hits. But there’s a lingering misperception that Jay said the band sometimes still faces. “If people knew us really well, they would know how passionate we are about country music and what a deep love we have for it,” he said. “When we first came out, we had trendy clothes, I think I had some earrings when we first came out, but we were automatically derided as guys who ride the train of country music to be successful because we couldn’t do it in pop music. We were easily dismissed that way, but the thing about it is we did country music because we’re country music lovers. It’s in our DNA.”

And with 15 years of proving that they’re country strong, Gary says he’s looking forward to the next 15. “Who knows what God has in store for us? We love going to Europe,

we love the States, but first and foremost, the next 15 years hopefully we’re writing and recording the best stuff we’ve ever done and [continuing] on the journey of touching people’s lives through music and telling their stories through song.”

Rascal Flatts hits the road again in late May on Riot Tour 2015, with opening act Scotty McCreery, but before then, the band will compete for vocal group of the year at the 50th annual Academy of Country Music Awards in Arlington, Texas, on April 19. Rascal Flatts has won the award six times before, most recently in 2009. “We’re so humbled to be back in the category,” said Jay. “I think sometimes you can take certain things for granted in your career and we had gotten used to being nominated, and then all of a sudden it was gone. We have a greater appreciation for being back in [the category] and we feel even more grateful for it this time than maybe in some previous years.” **CW**

[ON TOUR]

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BOK Center

April 11

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April 22-23

Bozeman, Mont.

Brick Breeden
Fieldhouse

April 24

Spokane, Wash.

Spokane Arena

April 25

Eugene, Ore.

Matthew Knight Arena

May 2

San Francisco

Levi's Stadium

May 7

Grand Rapids, Mich.

Van Andel Arena

May 8

Louisville, Ky.

KFC Yum! Center

May 9

Fort Wayne, Ind.

Allen County War
Memorial Coliseum

May 14

Corpus Christi, Texas

American Bank Center

May 15

Beaumont, Texas

Ford Arena

May 16

Arlington, Texas

AT&T Stadium

May 28

Charleston, W.Va.

Charleston Civic
Center Coliseum

May 29

Hartford, Conn.

Xfinity Theatre

May 30

Hershey, Pa.

Hersheypark Stadium

June 20

Green Bay, Wis.

Lambeau Field

June 27

Seattle

CenturyLink Field

[CATCHING UP WITH]

KNOWING B



PHOTO COURTESY CAMPBELL ENTERTAINMENT

A cancer-free Wade Hayes makes every moment count.

STORY BY DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

BETTER



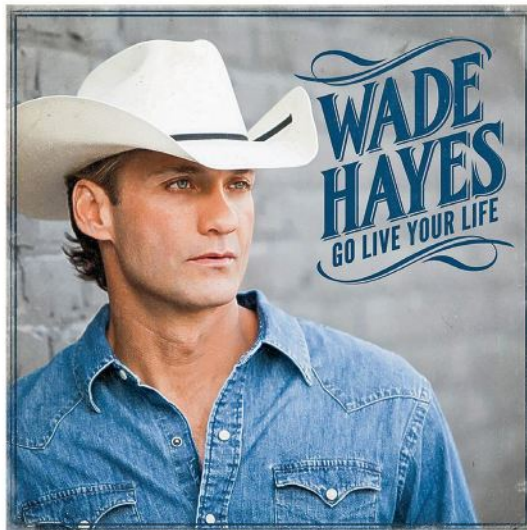
The best country songs come from real-life experiences, and few have a more compelling back story than the title track of Wade Hayes' new album, *Go Live Your Life*.

"It's actually a true story," Wade says. "When I'd gotten through cancer the second time, and we were looking at my blood work, my oncologist was talking about taking my port out. A port is something they implant into either your chest or under your arm where you receive chemotherapy. My oncologist said, 'Wade, you were stage IV and now you're cancer-free. We can take your port out. This is a big deal and I want to tell you something. I want you to go live your life.'" Wade took those words to heart and threw himself back into his passions—working on old trucks, playing with his dog, Jack, and of course, making country music.

Seated in a downtown Nashville restaurant, wearing jeans and a casual gray shirt, Wade looks healthy and fit. Tall and broad-shouldered, he's packed some weight back on his 6-foot-2 frame. It's hard to imagine that at one point he had only a 12 percent chance of surviving.

Wade was first diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer in October 2011, and after surgery and chemotherapy, it looked like he had beat it. Then came the devastating news in fall 2012 that it was back. "It came back in my lymph nodes, near the original cancer site," he says. "I had to take chemo for several months prior to surgery, and then they did surgery again, opened me up nearly in the exact same spot, and got all the lymph nodes out that were affected. I've been cancer-free since."

Wade will never forget when the oncologist pronounced him cancer-free the second time.



“Go Live Your Life”

It's a chilly afternoon in Lebanon, Tenn., a little east of Nashville, and Wade's dog, Jack, is happily sitting alongside his owner in the front seat of Wade's 1973 Ford truck as he shoots a video for his new single, "Go Live Your Life." Suddenly a drone dips down from the sky and hovers near the windshield. Jack goes nuts. He doesn't mind starring in a country music video, but the drone is a bit too much for the energetic pet.

"I'd never seen a drone in person," Wade says, crediting director Korby Lenker with the idea to

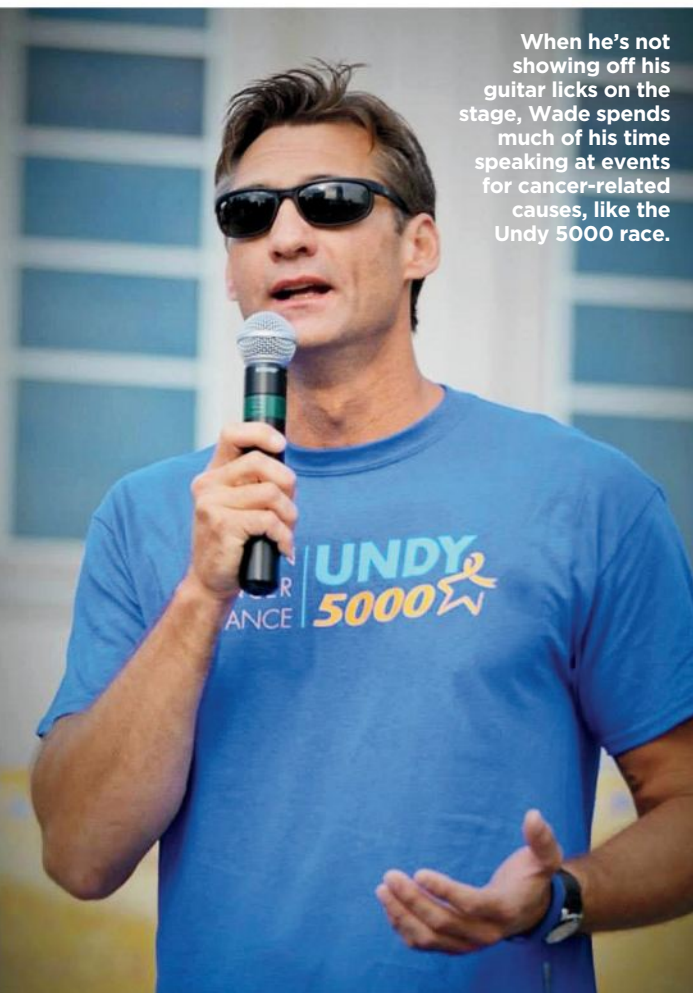
use one to film his video. "It was incredible. It was the most fascinating machine I've seen in years. I loved it. But Jack, my dog, about lost his mind."

The drone hovers above the truck filming while Wade drives through the countryside. "One of the things the song is about is finding the things in life that make you happy, taking time for them, reaching for those things, and just not taking them for granted," Wade explains. "One of the few things in this life that actually does make me happy is riding around out in the country in that old truck. So that was a big part of the video for my personal satisfaction."



Cutting-edge drone camera technology helped Wade and director Korby Lenker make the video for "Go Live Your Life," but Wade's dog, Jack, was not a fan of the flying contraption while they were filming in the truck.





When he's not showing off his guitar licks on the stage, Wade spends much of his time speaking at events for cancer-related causes, like the Undy 5000 race.



WADE HAYES CONTINUED

"It hit me like a ton of bricks," he says, "because I knew that he meant two different things: One being, it's kind of a miracle that you're still here. You need to go enjoy your life. And two being, you had cancer really bad, and when it spread as far as it did, there's a good chance that it can come back. He was telling me to go live my life, because we don't know how long this good is going to be. I told Bobby Pinson that story and we wrote the song."

"Go Live Your Life" anchors an album that mixes up-tempo tunes such as "Remember the Alimony" and poignant ballads like "If the Sun Comes Up." After everything Wade has been through, no one could blame the Oklahoma native for crafting a heavy collection of songs

on the fragility of life, but that's not what he delivers. The new album—his first since 2009's *Place to Turn Around*—is the perfect balance of meaty, personal songs and playful, upbeat numbers. "Some of my favorite songs on this new project are just made-up stuff that's fun to play, fun stories," he says. "It's fun musically. Every song has its place. Not every song's going to be 'Bridge Over Troubled Water.' We need an 'Achy Breaky' in there somewhere."

Wade is also touring again, frequently teaming up for shows with Bryan White and Mark Wills. "I'm enjoying it more now than I ever have," he says of performing. "I do feel a lot more comfortable and I think the whole deal with getting sick has changed me immensely. It's as if I'm looking through different

eyeballs now. I notice things like the night sky, the stars. I'm fascinated with them now. Every night that it's clear, I go out and look."

When asked why he survived in the face of incredible odds, Wade turns spiritual. "I know why I'm still here. Not to take anything from the medical people because they're brilliant, but God has made it clear to me that He's the reason I'm still here," he says. "I know that I still have something to do here and I'm trying my best. I've been spared to, hopefully, help somebody else who's been diagnosed, or help somebody not go through this in the first place, to get them screened early enough. I feel like that's the reason. It's not because [I'm] a good person, because I'm not. I'm a regular guy. I'm just like everyone else." **CW**

[REVIEWS]



ALBUMS

DARIUS RUCKER

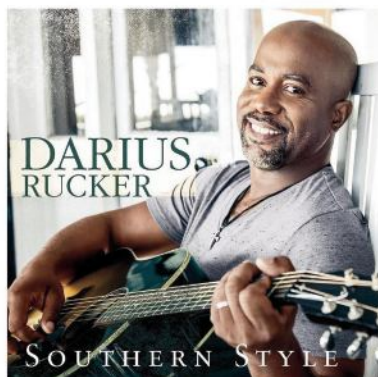
Southern Style

CAPITOL NASHVILLE

GRADE: B+

Happy. No, not the megahit from recognizably hatted Pharrell Williams. It's the unspoken theme of Darius Rucker's newest album, *Southern Style*.

Like the debut single, "Home-grown Honey," the vast majority of the album, 12 out of 13 songs, is happy, positive and mid-to-up-tempo. And there's nothing not to like about that. Darius, his longtime friend and producer Frank Rog-



ers and his fellow songwriters have created a listenable project that is so full of love, fun and sweet memories, you can practically see the smile on Darius' lips as he sings tunes like the rolling "Low Country" or the snappy "You, Me and My Guitar." With this,

his fourth country album, Darius and his team have most definitely solidified his sound with expertly layered, but not overdone, musical arrangements that add some dimension to his already warmly textured vocals.

Although heavy on chugga-chugga shuffle beats, *Southern Style* builds nicely to "You Can Have Charleston," the sole, beautifully written heart-breaker on the project. But it might be the presumed autobiographical final track, "So I Sang," that tugs the heartstrings the most and reminds us why he has become such a respected solo artist in country music.

— TAMMY RAGUSA

AT A GLANCE: Hootie who?



KRISTIAN BUSH

Southern Gravity

STREAMSOUND RECORDS

GRADE: B+

Kristian steps out of the Sugarland shadow and crafts a highly personal, groove-oriented effort that one could rightly call the “feel-good” album of the year. Which might lead you to believe that it’s some airy bit of nonsense with no more substance than cotton candy. But not so. The lyrics throughout have a highly descriptive,

reflective quality, in particular the sweetly romantic “Sending You a Sunset” and the soothing closer, “House on a Beach.” Kristian taps into his love of all things musical, with his reggae influences shining through on the hit “Trailer Hitch,” a nice piece of philosophy about giving back. The title track is yet another ode to the South, but this comes with less pandering and more wistfully stated feeling, a luxurious outing that makes you feel like a character in a Eudora Welty novel. The Tom Petty-ish “Make Another Memory,” which kicks off the album, stands as a likely future single candidate. In all, only “Light Me Up” and “Waiting On an Angel” (the title tells you all you need to know) miss the mark. But overall, you’ll be drawn to the good and positive vibes, delivered with Kristian’s laid-back but soulful style, unbelievably catchy melodies and warm sentiments. — **BOB PAXMAN**

AT A GLANCE: Let *Southern Gravity* pull you in.



RANDY ROGERS & WADE BOWEN

Hold My Beer, Vol. 1

LILBUDDY TOONS

GRADE: A

Randy Rogers and Wade Bowen have been chewing up the same Texas caliche since the early 2000s, so it seems only natural the BFFs trade licks on their new duet album, *Hold My Beer, Vol. 1*, which drops on April 20. The album, produced by Lloyd Maines (Dixie Chicks, Robert

Earl Keen), is a studio extension of their *Hold My Beer* and *Watch This Tour*, a fun-loving, scaled-back jaunt the boys have been partaking in for the last eight years. Basically, Randy and Wade were bros before bro-country neutered country radio, and their new album is the perfect microcosm of everything that’s good about friends collaborating, from the cover of Willie and Merle’s “Reasons to Quit” to the happy-go-lucky “Lady Bug” and honky-tonker “Good Luck With That,” which are two of the seven originals on the record. The 10-song offering is a Texas-sized foot-stomper—full of fiddle and steel, frivolity and standards (pun intended regarding track six, “I’ve Got Standards”)—from two guys who give a good name to bro-mance. — **JIM CASEY**

AT A GLANCE: We’re ready for Vol. 2.

GRADES: A OUTSTANDING | B ABOVE AVERAGE | C AVERAGE | D BELOW AVERAGE | F #FAIL



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ESSENTIAL LISTENING:

- "Civilizations"
- "Healing to Do"
- "Trouble in Your Heart"
- "Don't Strike Me Down"



All songs from *Radium Death*. For more info, visit williamelliottwhitmore.com.

A LITTLE CHANGE CAN be a good thing, particularly when it comes to recording music. Singer/songwriter William Elliott Whitmore was certainly open to the idea with his new album, *Radium Death*, which offers a few electrified, full-band arrangements in addition to the stark, acoustic banjo or guitar folk songs that have long been his stock and trade.

"We always say, this record'll be around long after I'm dead, so do what's best for the music," says William, who recorded *Radium Death* with his cousin Luke Tweedy. "It's easy to stick to conventions and think, well, gosh, I've never done organ, [but] you have to be open to new things."

But William, who still lives on the farm in Iowa where he grew up, retains the voice that helped launch his career, a weathered instrument that sounds as old as time itself. Not content to be merely a nostalgia act singing Lead Belly tunes, however, William injects his songs like "Civilizations" and

"Healing to Do" with a punkish intensity that stands out from his quieter peers.

"I always felt like punk and blues and country, it's based in the same sort of attitude," explains William, who grew up with his family's country music before falling in with the DIY punk scene in Iowa City. "That's not a new realization. It's different sides of the same coin—using a few chords to put forth an idea."

William originally cut his teeth playing basements and house parties with punk bands, sticking out like a sore thumb with just his banjo and guitar. "I kind of came in through the side door of the music scene playing my banjo," he says, laughing. "I'd play these folk/country songs opening up for these hardcore bands that are just screaming, carrying on, so to stand out I had to get my presence known and it meant singing louder."

There's a nuanced sense of punk rock's politics in songs like "Ain't

Gone Yet" and "Civilizations," where hardworking folks are just pawns caught in a global quest for destruction, where mountaintops and forests are just obstacles to get the goodies underneath. "I like the idea that empires rise, empires fall, and really just regular people are just trying to survive," he explains, "and we're just trying to figure out what's for supper."

And though *Radium Death* does have many quieter moments, like "Can't Go Back," William's songs have a knife-like edge that speaks to his punk background, an education that continues to inform the way he looks at his music today.

"Those punk rock ethics, I still carry with me: be courteous, just do your job and don't have a big ego," he says. "It's like working on the farm. Don't expect a pat on the back because you scooped out the horse stall. It's your job, just do it."

Plugged into an amp or not, that's a solid guiding principle for any musician.

— JON FREEMAN

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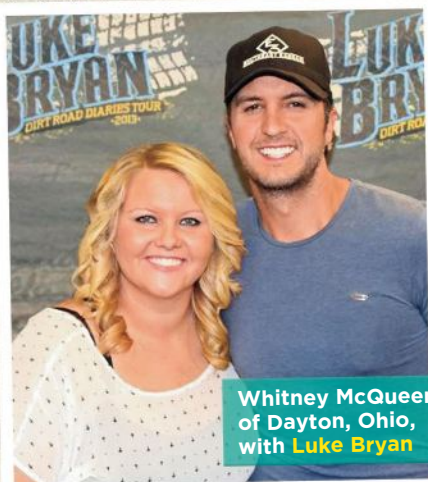
→ Country Weekly readers rub elbows with their favorite stars . . .



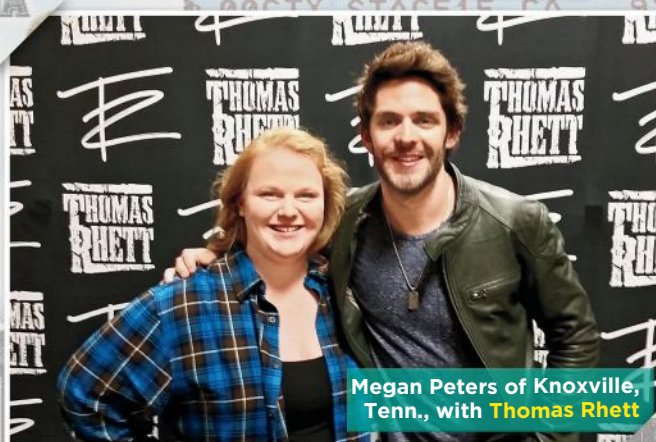
Dan + Shay with
Andrea Hardy of
Atwater, Calif.



Joseph Manno of East
Hanover, N.J., with
Scotty McCreery



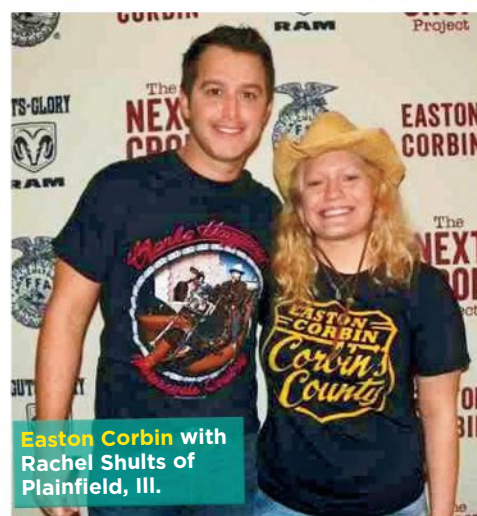
Whitney McQueen
of Dayton, Ohio,
with Luke Bryan



Megan Peters of Knoxville,
Tenn., with Thomas Rhett



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with Kris Wexell
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Easton Corbin with
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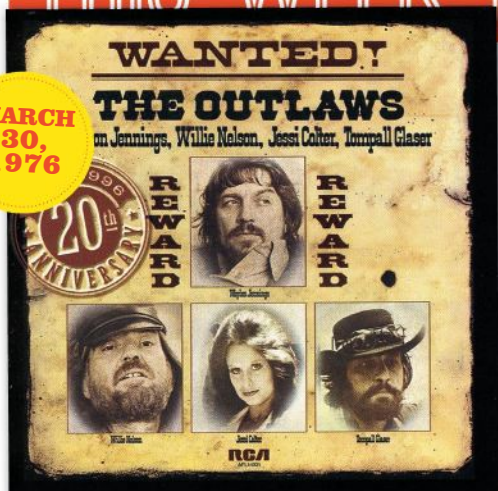
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[FLASHBACK]

THIS WEEK IN COUNTRY

MARCH 30, 1976



They called themselves “The Outlaws,” a determined group of artists—**WILLIE NELSON**, **WAYLON JENNINGS**, **JESSI COLTER** and **TOMPALL GLASER**—who rebelled against the Nashville way of making music. The maverick band wanted control over their own music, which songs they could perform and who would produce them. Their album *Wanted!* *The Outlaws*, released in February 1976, became their statement, with songs like “Good Hearted Woman” and “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys.” By the end of February, it sat on top of the country albums chart. On March 30, 1976, the album earned a gold certification for sales of 500,000 copies, and it went on to become the first country album to receive platinum certification for 1 million copies.

Songwriter Dean Dillon may not have cared for his own composition, but **GEORGE STRAIT** latched onto “Ocean Front Property” and turned it into a No. 1 hit. Dean has often expressed the fact that he never liked the song, which he wrote with Hank Cochran and Royce Porter, because of its novelty angle. “It’s just not the kind of song I like to write,” Dean told *Country Weekly*. “I just don’t write funny songs. I don’t consider myself that kind of writer where you have to use humor.” But he was surely smiling after seeing the results. George released the song in January 1987, and on April 4, “Ocean Front Property” became his 10th career No. 1 hit.



APRIL 4, 1987

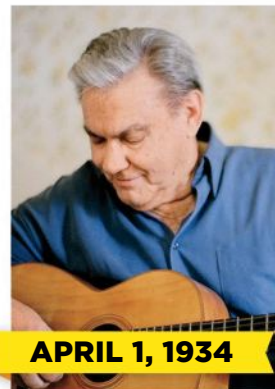
MIRANDA LAMBERT was the shining star of the evening at the 46th Annual Academy of Country Music Awards show, held April 3, 2011, at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. Miranda took home four honors, three of them triggered by her No. 1 single “The House That Built Me”—Single Record of the Year, Song of the Year and Video of the Year. She also triumphed as Female Vocalist of the Year, which she accepted with a tearful speech. “I feel so blessed and humbled,” Miranda said. “I thank God for giving me the blessing of living my dream.”



APRIL 3, 2011

To read more on **Jim Ed Brown**, go to CountryWeekly.com/magazine/vault

BIRTHDAYS



APRIL 1, 1934

JIM ED BROWN

born in Sparkman, Ark., has released a new album, *In Style Again*, after a battle with lung cancer.

MARCH 30, 1984
JUSTIN MOORE

MARCH 30, 1990
THOMAS RHETT

APRIL 1, 1980
KIP MOORE

APRIL 1, 1986
HILLARY SCOTT
of Lady Antebellum

APRIL 2, 1947
EMMYLOU HARRIS

APRIL 2, 1961
BUDDY JEWELL

APRIL 3, 1942
BILLY JOE ROYAL

APRIL 4, 1951
STEVE GATLIN
of The Gatlin Brothers

APRIL 5, 1967
TROY GENTRY
of Montgomery Gentry

APRIL 5, 1972
PAT GREEN

APRIL 5, 1981
MIKE ELI
of Eli Young Band

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Introducing *Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, It's Off to Sleep We Go*, an Ashton-Drake FIRST celebrating the 75th anniversary of this beloved film. Each doll in the collection is just 6 inches long, but so full of expressive detail, you can see each character's personality adorably brought to life in artisan resin. Cuddly beanbag bodies and charming outfits featuring Disney artwork make this collection even more enchanting!

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☐ **YES!** Please reserve the *Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho, It's Off to Sleep We Go* miniature doll collection for me as described in this announcement, beginning with "Happy."

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E-mail Address _____ **913725-D08102**

*Plus a total of \$7.99 shipping and service charges per doll. Please allow 2 to 4 weeks for shipment after order is received. All orders are subject to acceptance.

[CHARTS]

WEEK ENDING MARCH 21, 2015

ALBUMS



Up 622 percent in sales after two weeks out, Shania Twain's live recording documenting her Caesars Palace residency moves up, up, up to No. 2.

SINGLES

Lucky Jason Aldean. The second single from his sixth studio album, *Old Boots, New Dirt*, is his 13th *Billboard* chart-topper.



Randy Houser's video for "Like a Cowboy," shot on location in Tucson, Ariz., moseys on up to No. 9.

CMT VIDEOS

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	1	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
2	31	SHANIA: STILL THE ONE—LIVE FROM VEGAS SHANIA TWAIN
3	3	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
4	4	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
5	5	GREATEST HITS: DECADE #1 CARRIE UNDERWOOD
6	8	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
7	6	IGNITE THE NIGHT CHASE RICE
8	2	THE UNDERDOG AARON WATSON
9	9	PLATINUM MIRANDA LAMBERT
10	7	CRASH MY PARTY LUKE BRYAN
11	19	GREATEST HITS SO FAR . . . ZAC BROWN BAND
12	13	MAN AGAINST MACHINE GARTH BROOKS
13	18	THE COWBOY RIDES AWAY: LIVE FROM AT&T STADIUM • GEORGE STRAIT
14	—	STILL KING: CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF BOB WILLS AND HIS TEXAS PLAYBOYS • ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL
15	20	COLE SWINDELL COLE SWINDELL
16	—	THE AVERAGE JOES DJ'S PRESENT: MUD IN THE CLUB, VOL 1 • VARIOUS ARTISTS
17	12	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
18	11	BRINGING BACK THE SUNSHINE BLAKE SHELTON
19	16	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
20	10	MONO THE MAVERICKS
21	21	THE BIG REVIVAL KENNY CHESNEY
22	24	I DON'T DANCE LEE BRICE
23	14	TERRAPLANE STEVE EARLE & THE DUKES
24	22	SUNDOWN HEAVEN TOWN TIM MCGRAW
25	23	METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC STURGILL SIMPSON

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	3	JUST GETTIN' STARTED JASON ALDEAN
2	5	MEAN TO ME BRETT ELDRIDGE
3	1	LONELY TONIGHT BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
4	7	AIN'T WORTH THE WHISKEY COLE SWINDELL
5	6	LONELY EYES CHRIS YOUNG
6	8	HOMEGROWN HONEY DARIUS RUCKER
7	2	MAKE ME WANNA THOMAS RHETT
8	9	DRINKING CLASS LEE BRICE
9	11	HOMEGROWN ZAC BROWN BAND
10	10	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
11	12	SAY YOU DO DIERKS BENTLEY
12	13	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEATURING ERIC CHURCH
13	14	A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR TYLER FARR
14	15	WHAT WE AIN'T GOT JAKE OWEN
15	16	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES
16	17	LITTLE RED WAGON MIRANDA LAMBERT
17	18	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
18	20	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
19	19	SHE DON'T LOVE YOU ERIC PAISLEY
20	22	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW WITH CATHERINE DUNN
21	21	BABY BE MY LOVE SONG EASTON CORBIN
22	24	CRUSHIN' IT BRAD PAISLEY
23	27	LITTLE TOY GUYS CARRIE UNDERWOOD
24	25	LOVE ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT KELSEA BALLERINI
25	23	HARD TO BE COOL JOE NICHOLS
26	35	SIPPIN' ON FIRE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
27	26	LOVE YOU LIKE THAT CANAAN SMITH
28	28	LAY LOW JOSH TURNER
29	29	TROUBLE GLORIA NA
30	32	YOUNG & CRAZY FRANKIE BALLARD

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	2	LONELY TONIGHT • BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
2	3	MAKE ME WANNA THOMAS RHETT
3	4	JUST GETTIN' STARTED JASON ALDEAN
4	5	MEAN TO ME BRETT ELDRIDGE
5	7	LONELY EYES CHRIS YOUNG
6	6	HOMEGROWN HONEY DARIUS RUCKER
7	1	SUN DAZE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
8	9	DRINKING CLASS LEE BRICE
9	11	LIKE A COWBOY RANDY HOUSER
10	10	FREESTYLE (FROM CMT'S ULTIMATE KICKOFF PARTY) LADY ANTEBELLUM

SOURCE: CMT



Just three weeks after entering the Top 10, Carrie Underwood's clip for "Little Toy Guns" pops to the top.

GAC VIDEOS

THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	TITLE/ARTIST
1	6	LITTLE TOY GUNS CARRIE UNDERWOOD
2	1	TALLADEGA ERIC CHURCH
3	2	SUN DAZE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
4	4	LONELY TONIGHT • BLAKE SHELTON FEAT. ASHLEY MONROE
5	7	MAKE ME WANNA THOMAS RHETT
6	3	SOMETHING IN THE WATER CARRIE UNDERWOOD
7	5	LONELY EYES CHRIS YOUNG
8	10	JUST GETTIN' STARTED JASON ALDEAN
9	12	DRINKING CLASS LEE BRICE
10	9	LAY LOW JOSH TURNER

SOURCE: GAC

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COUNTRY WEEKLY

Anxiously awaiting that new album from your favorite artist?
Eager to discuss the hot concert you just saw?
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MATCH-UP

Some of our favorite multitasking country stars have released new albums, and some have recently written books and tackled movie and Broadway roles. Match the stars listed below with their albums, books and acting roles.



1

A



2

B



3

C



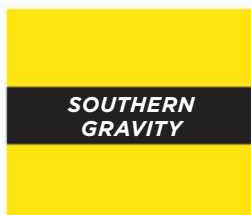
4

D



5

E



6

F



ANSWERS: 1-F, 2-C, 3-A, 4-B, 5-E, 6-D

COUNTRY WEEKLY

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W I E B C G U I T A R U K G T I I E G O
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Y H N L T R M L U X D T N K R H W N D T
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C O R N M A N N N B R D C L A N E H I O
A X R I R I D E U A X T O A G N R L G B
W W A T H J Z X K H S I R W L I S H R W
S H E S C O U N T R Y U D I N I R D O O
B D I G I T A L A R T I S T D W S W E C
W F G V R A G N O C A M X A P S N T G Q

ACM MALE VOCALIST
ALDEAN ARMY
AMARILLO SKY
BASEBALL
BIG GREEN TRACTOR
BROKEN BOW
BURNIN' IT DOWN
COWBOY HAT
DIGITAL ARTIST
DIRT ROAD ANTHEM
DON'T YOU WANNA
STAY

EARRINGS
ERIC CHURCH
FENWAY PARK
FISHING
GEORGIA BULLDOGS
GUITAR
HICKTOWN
HUNTING
JUST GETTIN'
STARTED
KEELEY
KENDYL

LUKE BRYAN
MACON, GA
MICHAEL KNOX
MY KINDA PARTY
NIGHT TRAIN
SHE'S COUNTRY
SUSAN G. KOMEN
TATTOOS
WHY
BRITTANY
WRANGLERS
WRIGLEY FIELD



Find the words, titles and phrases in this wordsearch challenge submitted by **Cara Bender** of **Disputanta, Va.** NOTE—they may appear vertically, horizontally, diagonally, backward or forward. Good luck!

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I like it when . . .

She likes it.

My favorite TV show is . . .

Andy Griffith.

My favorite color is . . .

Electric blue.

If I could change one thing
about myself it would be . . .

I wouldn't.

I would love to do
a duet with . . . ➔

Conway Twitty.

A guy can never
have too many . . .

Tools.

The one word that
describes my day
today is . . .

A blur.

I think that _____ suck.

Politics.

I wish I were . . .

Doing another interview
with you tomorrow.

Music is . . .

The truest love I've ever
known.

The first thing I do in the
morning is . . .

Brush my face and wash
my teeth.

I can't live without . . .

Duh!



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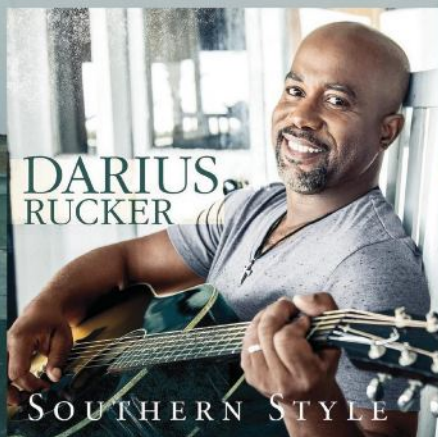
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